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**CAUSERIES DU LUNDI**

(January, 1851—March, 1851)

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**CAUSERIES DU LUNDI**

**VOLS. I., II., III., IV.**

*Others in Active Preparation.*

# CAUSERIES DU LUNDI

By  
C. A. SAINTE-BEUVE

VOL. V  
*(January, 1851—March, 1851)*

Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by  
E. J. TRECHMANN, M.A., Ph.D



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## SAINT-SIMON<sup>1</sup>

*Monday, January 13, 1851.*

No literature is richer in memoirs than the French : with Villehardouin, at the end of the twelfth century, begin the first memoirs that we possess. There we already see our French prose with those simple, straightforward and natural qualities which it will always possess, and with those notes of epic grandeur which it will not always preserve. After Villehardouin, who stands out as the first monument on the horizon, we have, even in those old centuries, a succession of admirable historical pictures drawn by witnesses and contemporaries, Froissart, Commines, and others in their train. Thus, through an uninterrupted series of memorable narratives, we come to the epochs of Louis XIII and Louis XIV, so rich in that kind of productions and testimonies. With the *Memoirs of the Cardinal de Retz* it seemed as if perfection had been reached, in respect of interest, of movement, of moral analysis and liveliness of painting, and it was hardly to be hoped that they could be surpassed. But they were followed by the *Memoirs of Saint-Simon*, in which we find qualities of fullness, of breadth and connectedness, qualities of expression and colour, which make it the greatest and most precious body of memoirs hitherto existing. On finishing them, the author was truly entitled to judge of them as he did in the following words : ' I think I am justified in saying that there have not been any hitherto that surpass them in variety of matter, in depth and detail, or that form a more instructive or more curious group '.

These vast *Memoirs*, which did not appear in full until 1829-1830, had been long known, and had been consulted

<sup>1</sup> *The Memoirs of Saint-Simon.*



by historians, and those who were curious in such matters ; Duclos and Marmontel made continual use of them for their Histories of the Regency. The Letters of Mme Du Deffand to Horace Walpole are quite full of the Memoirs of Saint-Simon, which are read to her : the Duc de Choiseul had lent her, as a favour, the manuscript which was deposited at the Office of Foreign Affairs. She speaks of them incessantly, and her impressions vary even in the course of her reading. At first she thinks them merely amusing, although, as she says, 'their style is *abominable*, and the portraits *badly done*', that is to say, thrown as if with a coarse brush and in strange colours. But soon the sense of their truthfulness carries the day ; she is seized with wonder and admiration, and is in despair that Walpole is not there to share with her the enjoyment of the incomparable reading : 'You would take an endless delight in Saint-Simon, she writes to him time after time, an *unspeakable* delight ; *he would put you beside yourself*'. That is the truth, and the effect which these Memoirs produce upon all who read them with continuity ; they put you *beside yourself*, and carry you whether you will or no into the midst of the persons and living scenes that they paint.

The existence of these Memoirs was however a terror to many people who knew that they and theirs had been roughly handled in them, and branded with fiery touches. Voltaire, who had painted the Age of Louis XIV with so much talent and charm, but in rose colours, and had been informed of the contradictions which Saint-Simon's authority might some day raise up against him, proposed to refute some portions of these Memoirs. He was engaged upon this refutation during his last visit to Paris, and even up to his death. But it seems to me that in the matter of the Age of Louis XIV Voltaire's intentions were patriotic rather than truthful. Speaking of certain documents, certain despatches of Chamillart which he had had in his possession and which might have been calculated to dishonour the Ministry between 1701 and 1709, Voltaire wrote to the Maréchal de Noailles (1752) : 'I have had the discretion not to make any use of them, being concerned rather with the things that may be glorious and useful to my nation than with telling disagreeable truths'. This was far from being the point of view of

Saint-Simon, of whom it has been said with reason that he was 'as curious as Froissart, as penetrating as La Bruyère, and as passionate as Alceste'.

Saint-Simon, born in January 1675, of a father who was already advanced in years, once a favourite of Louis XIII, to whom he owed all his fortune; brought up by a virtuous and distinguished mother, very early manifested an in-born taste for reading, and for the reading of history in particular. After reading the historical memoirs written since François I, when he was hardly more than a boy, he conceived the idea of putting down in writing everything that he should see, in such a way that it should live again after him, firmly resolving to keep the secret to himself as long as he lived, and to allow his manuscript to sleep *under the surest lock and key*: a rare sign of caution in a young man, which in itself denotes a vocation. He began his Memoirs then in July 1694, at the age of nineteen, when he was still in the army. From that moment he never ceased to write and to keep his eyes open, with that end in view, upon all the doings of his times that it was possible to know, to perceive and to divine. So, when later, during his retirement, he put the finishing touches to his Memoirs and gave them their final shape, he had precise documents and daily notes to work upon. It cannot therefore be asserted, in order to invalidate his authority as a witness, that he wrote his Memoirs late in life and from distant and cooked up reminiscences.

Saint-Simon's public and political life is simple enough, and would hardly deserve a mention, if he had not been an observer and a historian. He was young when he entered military service, and retired very early after a few campaigns, as the result of having failed to obtain the promotion he had expected. Married to the daughter of the Maréchal de Lorge, living chastely and at the same time in the highest society, he showed himself, on every occasion, very zealous to uphold the prerogatives attaching to the rank of *Duke and Peer*; he was involved in several law-suits and quarrels on that question which he maintained with heat, and which, even at that time, gave him a slight tint of eccentricity and monomania. Very intimate, in spite of his virtue, with the Duke of Orleans, the future Regent, he stood by him firmly on the occasion of the infamous accusations by which he was pursued,

and had afterwards a very real and a very active influence in the first measures of the Regency. At this moment occurred his first bit of historical action. He laboured with all his power at raising the influence of the Nobility, which he personified in the class and species of *Dukes and Peers*, at keeping down on the one hand the Lawyers and the Parliament, and on the other at precipitating from their usurped rank the legitimized bastards of Louis XIV, who were his great nightmare and his pet aversion. After that he temporarily held an honorary embassy in Spain, he then entered into private life, and died in 1755, at the age of eighty years.

On the occasion of one of these quarrels about etiquette and prerogative which Saint-Simon started, Louis XIV could not help remarking 'that it was a strange thing that, since he had left the service, M. de Saint-Simon thought of nothing but studying ranks and going to law with all the world'. No doubt Saint-Simon was possessed with the mania for classifying ranks, but, above and before all, he had a passion for observing, for living into the characters of men, for reading expressions, for unravelling the true and the false of the various intrigues and manœuvres, and committing all this to paper, in an animated, ardent, invented style, with an incredible dash, and with a relief that the language had hitherto never attained to. 'He writes like a demon (*à la diable*) for immortality', Chateaubriand said of him. That is indeed so, and more than that. Saint-Simon was so to say the spy of his age; that was his function, and Louis XIV had no suspicion of it. But what a redoubtable spy, prowling around on all sides with his greedy curiosity to seize everything! 'I examined every personage, *with eyes and ears*', he confesses at every moment. And that secret, which he seeks and wrests from all, from their very entrails, he delivers up and spreads out before us, I repeat, in a speaking, animated language, warmed up to madness, palpitating with joy or anger, a language which we might imagine Molière to have used, if he had made history his pasture-ground.

It has been said that Saint-Simon was never able to enter with any profit into the course of the affairs of this world and the management of the things of his time. I quite believe it; there is a degree of incisiveness in his

observation, of revolt in the moral impression, and of fire in his talent, which excludes political address and circumspection. With such qualities one is finally apt for one thing only, for noting, for knowing and criticizing what others do. And for him it was reserved to say it and print it for posterity in a unique manner.

A writer and colleague whom I hold in high respect for his serious and elevated mind as well as for his character, M. de Noailles, in his *Histoire de Mme de Maintenon* (vol. i. p. 285), has laid himself out to oppose Saint-Simon, and brought accusations and imputations against him which I find it impossible to admit as sweepingly as he makes them. If it was merely the intention of the Duc de Noailles to take severe reprisals against Saint-Simon for the spiteful and insulting manner in which he spoke of the Maréchal de Noailles his ancestor and of Mme de Maintenon, that is quite excusable and legitimate up to a certain point: those are family quarrels in which it is not our business to intervene. But if M. de Noailles intended it for an impartial, disinterested and historical judgment, and one worthy of his intellect, I make so bold as to think that he has not done Saint-Simon the signal justice which that great observer and painter deserves in so many respects, and particularly for his *good faith*, for his *probity*, for the *love of truth* which shows even through his errors and his hatreds, and for a certain *honest courage* which he never failed to show even in his excesses.

There are two ways of regarding the things and persons of the world and of history: either to accept them at their surface value, in their specious and conventional arrangement, in their more or less dignified and solemn bearing; and this first point of view is easy, almost natural, when one has to do with epochs like that of Louis XIV, in which decorum reigned. It was in this sense that Voltaire himself, and M. de Bausset, the historian of Bossuet and Fénelon, and others besides, spoke of that noble reign. The great moralist La Rochefoucauld defined the *gravity* of certain people as *a mystery of the body invented for the purpose of hiding the defects of the mind*. And, indeed, most of those persons who have this apparent gravity are rightly afraid of familiarity; they fear that those whom they allow to come too near might *feel*, so to say, for the defects in their armour, and find out where they are

weak. It is the same with certain epochs; and, towards the end, the reign of Louis XIV had great need of this kind of gravity and distant ceremonial, in order to guard itself against too penetrating minds. But for these latter there is another and much truer manner of seizing hold of the persons on the stage, of searching and sounding them in spite of themselves, of placing them in the light and pitilessly unmasking them. In order to find out this secret and this art of disrobing people and turning them inside out, we should go, not to the historians properly so called, but rather to the moralists and the painters of human nature, whatever shape they may have given to their picture, and whether they are called Molière, Cervantes, or Shakespeare, or even Tacitus. Now, this intimate blending of the moralist and the painter with the historian constitutes the originality of Saint-Simon, and is self-evident in the immense historical fresco that he has left us.

Let us take him at the beginning of his *Memoirs*. He begins in his *Introduction* by asking himself seriously, sincerely, and with an almost naïve anxiety, whether it is permitted to write and to read history, particularly that of one's own time. In order to explain this rather singular question and this scruple of Saint-Simon, we must remember that he was religious, that he was a believing, fervent and practical Christian; that he often went into retreat in the monastery of La Trappe, in the intervals of his nobiliary quarrels and his evil-speaking. Even though he is passionate, he is very well aware how incompatible charity may appear to be with a real view and an inexorable exposure of human nature and matters of history, seen, as he sees them, upon the reverse side of the tapestry: 'Is not innocent ignorance, he asks himself, to be preferred to a knowledge that is so far removed from charity?' But he answers boldly and as befits a generous nature. After alleging rather adroitly the example of the Holy Ghost, since the Holy Ghost did not disdain to dictate the first histories, he concludes that it is allowable to look around one, to exercise towards oneself that well ordained charity which consists in not remaining, in the presence of intriguers, in the condition of the blind, of *dullards* and *continual dupes*: 'The wicked who, in this world, already have so many advantages over the good, would enjoy

'another very strange advantage over them if the good were not permitted to discern them, to know them, and consequently to be on their guard against them. . . .' In short, charity, which imposes so many obligations, cannot impose 'that of not seeing things and people as they are'. So much being admitted, and believing himself in a position to take all his pleasure without too much sin, he launches forth on his way, and admirably defines history as he conceives it, in its whole extent, its branches, its dependencies, and with the final moral that one is able to draw from it, if after all a really religious mind takes it up; for, of that multitude of persons who are the actors on the stage of history, he remarks, 'if they had been able to read in the future the result of their labours, of their sweatings, of their anxieties and their plottings, all, *with the exception of about a dozen* at the most, would have stopped short at their very entrance into life, and would have abandoned their opinions and their dearest pretensions', recognizing that in this world there is nothing but vanity and emptiness.

Did Saint-Simon, full of hatred as he is at times, and implacable in his pursuit of those he pursues, fulfil all his promises? Did he guard himself against those passions which corrupt in its principle the austere charity which he himself defined, and the equitable disposition of the judge? No, assuredly not. But read, immediately after the *Introduction*, the four or five pages which terminate his last volume, with the heading *Conclusion*: he there boldly does himself justice, and at the same time insinuates a sincere *Mea culpa*. He has kept the truth in view, he exclaims, to the extent of sacrificing everything to it: 'It was even this love of truth that was most prejudicial to my fortune; I was often conscious of it, but I preferred the truth to everything, and was unable to stoop to any disguise; I may still say that I *cherished* it even when it was against my own interest'. However, if he holds his head so high in the matter of the truth, it must be admitted that impartiality was not his strong point; his feelings are too strong for that: 'We are charmed, he says, by the sight of truthful and upright persons; we are angered against the rogues who swarm in courts; we are still more angered against those who have done us an injury. The Stoic is a beautiful and noble chimera. I

‘do not then pride myself on impartiality, it would be a vain pretence’. So we must expect in Saint-Simon to see praise and blame flowing *from the source*, and in proportion as he is affected. The only thing he lays claim to, in his writings, is that, taking one thing with another, the truth will rise to the surface even of passion, and that, saving such or such a passage where his nature is at fault, the very *tissue* of his Memoirs will bear testimony to the sincerity and candour of his work as a whole.

There we see the honest man in Saint-Simon, and with the restrictions I have just made, and making allowance for invincible prejudices and antipathies, there is nothing in his writings that belies him. And, at the very beginning, speaking of his own father whom he has recently lost, and portraying him with filial sentiments that show elevation and nobility, what do we find him saying? He is not afraid of telling us how on one occasion he offered to carry an anything but honourable message from Louis XIII to Mlle d’Hautefort, and how the King himself called him to order. The whole portrait of his father is besides conceived in a lofty strain. If he deceives and flatters himself in describing him as a sort of last feudal *grand seigneur*, and makes him out to have sprung from the very noblest blood, and, at least on the female side, from the lineage of Charlemagne, this delusion becomes a principle of generosity and virtue. The pages in which he describes the old man, faithful to the last to the memory of Louis XIII, never failing to attend the yearly memorial service to the late King, at Saint Denis, on the fourteenth of May, and expressing his indignation on the last occasions at being *quite alone* in his attendance; these pages breathe a true eloquence of the heart and indicate an inherited magnanimity. Saint-Simon, this son of a favourite of Louis XIII, had an exaggerated and antique idea of the aristocracy, in conformity with a primitive independence, and, strange to say! after Richelieu and during the reign of Louis XIV, he aspired to see them play a legislative part in the State, such as they might have had in the time of Clovis or Pepin.

Saint-Simon’s first narratives treat of his campaigns: he starts with the Siege of Namur (1692). His first descriptions exhibit freshness and life: the Monastery of Marlaigne near Namur at once appears before our eyes,

with its hermitages and the surrounding country, in a way we are unaccustomed to see the things of nature under Louis XIV. Saint-Simon cannot help regarding everything that offers and painting everything that he sees. His captain Maupertuis, his friend Coesquen, are sketched with a few happy touches, and, in the person of Maupertuis, he already begins to criticize and demolish the pretensions to nobility of those he speaks of, a thing that subsequently he does continually. And indeed all these so vaunted claims to nobility, if closely regarded, are (even speaking from an aristocratic point of view) mere suppositions and chimeras. But it was not until the occasion of the marriage of his friend the Duc de Chartres, the future Regent, with one of the bastard daughters of Louis XIV, that Saint-Simon's curiosity is fully confessed and declared: 'Some rumour (of this marriage) had already reached my ears a few days before, and, as I rightly judged that there would be some violent scenes, curiosity made me very attentive and assiduous'. Louis XIV and his *terrifying* majesty which overawes his whole family, the weakness of the young prince who, in spite of his first resolution, consents to everything, the fury of his mother, the proud German, who sees herself obliged to give her own consent, and who is described as striding up and down the gallery at Versailles, with her handkerchief in her hand, 'gesticulating and looking very like Ceres after the abduction of her daughter Proserpine'; the vigorous and sounding box on the ear that she gives Monsieur her son before the whole Court, at the moment when he comes to kiss her hand, all is rendered with the turn and relief of a master brush. The painter already shows the plenitude of his vein and the breadth of his manner. The Princes of Lorraine, those infamous tools, employed to use their influence with Monsieur to make him acquiesce in this dishonourable marriage, are stigmatized as they deserve. Saint-Simon does not by any means belong to that French school, discreet, imitative, a slave to the city or the Court, that, before discharging an expression, asks itself whether it is proper or usual. He has the candour of the Gauls, or, if you prefer it, of the old Franks. Somebody or other said of Saint-Simon that when he writes badly, and when he forces his terms, he is already using the language of the first of the barbarians.



No, even then, Saint-Simon is in reality only the last of the conquerors.

On every page of Saint-Simon the scenes succeed one another, the groups stand out, the persons rise to their feet and walk before us. The Duc du Maine is to be married; M. de Montchevreuil, who had been his governor, remains with him in the capacity of Gentleman of his Chamber: 'Montchevreuil, he says, was a very honest man, modest, brave, but most dense. His wife, who was a Boucher-d'Orsay, was a tall, lean, yellow creature, *who laughed silly*, and showed a set of long and ugly teeth, pious to excess, self-contained in her bearing, and who only needed a wand to make her look like a perfect witch. Without any wit, she had so entirely captivated Mme de Maintenon, etc.' It is all like this, everything is made visible and speaks for itself, every person is translated to the life and in his nature. As in ordinary life, one person brings on another; he accosts, he is accosted; he makes his way as best he can through the throng. We assist, occasionally stifled, at this perpetual and unceasing comedy. A great historical painter, Saint-Simon excels in rendering individuals on foot, groups, crowds, both the general movements and the details in their minutest particular: he produces that double effect of details and ensembles. His history is a fresco after the manner of Rubens, thrown with a rapidity and ardour of the brush which allows him no time for careful drawing and fixing his lines before applying the paint: but the physiognomies, so full is he of them, stand out the more warmly. His work is like a vast historical *Village Fête* the scene of which is laid in the gallery at Versailles. The painter abounds and superabounds; he swims and everywhere revels to his heart's content. He has not the discretion of the line, and in this respect the artist in him is wanting. He is conscious of it, and quite at the end he asks our indulgence: 'I was never an *academic* subject, he says, I could never rid myself of the habit of writing rapidly'. If he had tried to touch up and correct, he would have spoiled and mutilated his work; he did well to leave it as it was, immense, moving, and a little exorbitant in many points.

Before a painting of such dimensions it is necessary to choose; I will take by preference two great scenes, in

order to illustrate some of Saint-Simon's high qualities. One of these scenes will be the picture he draws of the Court at the moment of the death of Monseigneur, Louis XIV's son. The second scene, which marks in some degree the happiest day of Saint-Simon's life, will be that of the Bed of Justice, in which was consummated under the Regency the degradation of the Duc du Maine and the legal ruin of the legitimized bastards.

In these two scenes, Saint-Simon is not merely a curious onlooker; he is interested in both. But, in the first of these scenes, the passion he brings to it does not exceed certain bounds; he still remains a moralist and a painter before everything, and does not betray himself, as he does in the second, with the excesses, the vices and, if I may say so, the ferocities of his vindictive nature.

We are in April 1711, and the royal family is still complete, when it suddenly becomes known that Monseigneur, the son of Louis XIV, a big man of about fifty, who seemed likely before long to succeed to the throne according to the natural order of things, has fallen dangerously ill at Meudon. Immediately all the ambitions, the fears and hopes of the courtiers are aroused and declare themselves. Saint-Simon is sincere and truthful, and here he will prove to us by his confessions that he is able to *cherish* the truth on occasion even when it tells against him. He was on bad terms with Monseigneur and those about him; hence the sudden news of this dangerous illness was at first most agreeable to him; he admits it without any hypocrisy: 'I passed the day, he says, in a vague movement of flow and ebb, keeping the gentleman and the Christian on his guard against the man and the courtier'. But however much he may try to make better feelings prevail, the natural man carries the day, and he lets himself go to smiling hopes for the future; for he was on a very good footing with the little Court of the Duke of Burgundy, who, by the death of his father, was on the eve of reigning. Whilst Monseigneur was dying at Meudon, 'Versailles, says Saint-Simon, presented another scene. The Duke and Duchess of Burgundy were holding open Court there, and this Court *was like the first appearance of the dawn*'. For five days these fluctuations and uncertainties continue, and he lets us miss nothing. At length the patient, who seemed better, has a relapse and dies. Immediately

upon the news of the last agony becoming known at Versailles, the whole of the Court streams with one accord to the residence of the Duchess of Burgundy to worship the rising sun. Here Saint-Simon begins a picture which surpasses anything we could imagine for sagacity of observation and for genius of expression in human matters. At the first rumour of the relapse and the agony, Saint-Simon hastens then to the Duchess of Burgundy, and finds all Versailles assembled there, the ladies half-dressed, the doors open, a confused medley, and one of the finest occasions he has ever met with for reading, as in an open book, the faces of the actors. 'This spectacle, he says, drew all the attention I was able to give to it amid the divers agitations of my soul'. And he begins to exercise his power of dissection and analysis upon every face in particular, beginning with the two sons of the moribund, then coming to their wives, and so by degrees to all who were interested.

'All those present, he says with a jubilation of curiosity which could not contain itself, were truly expressive actors, and it only needed *to have eyes*, without any knowledge of the Court, to distinguish *the interests painted upon their countenances*, or the vacuity of those who were not interested; the latter tranquil in themselves; the others penetrated with grief, or looking solemn and keeping a guard over themselves to hide their release and their joy'.

When he says that it was enough *to have eyes* to read all these diversities of interests upon the countenances, Saint-Simon attributes to others some of his own sagacity. He forgets that this sagacity, possessed to such a degree, is a gift which, happily, is granted only to a small number. Otherwise, if it were given to all to read so easily in others' hearts and to penetrate hidden motives, there would be an end of most friendships and intimacies, and even of the security of social intercourse. For such a gift is a difficult thing to manage and guide with wisdom and discretion, without ever abusing it. Solomon says somewhere in the book of Proverbs, 'As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man'. But it is difficult to remain cautious and wise when one is able to dive so deeply into other men's souls; it is difficult, even though we do not abuse this gift for interested and sordid ends, to help

ating and despising and showing our own antipathies and instincts ; and it was Saint-Simon's weakness as a man, and a part of his glory as a painter, that he yielded with passion and fire to all the movements of reaction which this second sight, with which he was gifted, excited in him.

Saint-Simon comes then right among all this crowd of people in undress ; to him it is the most agreeable of fêtes. He once more confesses his own secret feelings about the death of Monseigneur ; having as yet heard only of the last agony, he is not yet completely reassured : ' I felt in spite of myself, he says, a remnant of fear lest the patient might rally, and was extremely ashamed of myself '. There exists no man who, if we knew him well, has not sometimes something to blush for. Saint-Simon knows that, and he proves it in his own case. So much being admitted, and having made his own confession, he deliberately comes to confess others, and quite consciously begins that kind of universal dissection, that pitiless opening of souls, which makes him look, as he comes among this distracted crowd, like a wolf entering the sheep-fold, or a hound at the death of the quarry.

At a certain hour of the night, when positive news of the death has spread, we witness through him, in this great gallery of Versailles, an immense picture, through the apparent confusion of which there is still evident some sort of composition, which I will only indicate.

At the end of the gallery, in an open salon, are the two princes, the sons of the defunct, the Duke of Burgundy and the Duke of Berry, each having his princess at his side, seated on a sofa, near an open window, with their backs to the gallery, ' all the world scattered about, sitting and standing, in confusion, and the most intimate ladies on the floor at their feet '. The group is thrown up on the canvas : you see the picture.

Then come the apartments of the gallery, and the spectacle they contain. At the other end, in the *first* rooms, that is to say those farthest from the salon of the princes, are the valets, with difficulty restraining their *bellowings*, and in despair at the loss of so vulgar a master, ' so expressly made for them '. Among these afflicted valets glide others who are more circumspect, who have been sent thither by their masters to see and observe ; the Figaros

of the time, who have hastened at the news, 'and who betray by their mien *whose shops they sweep*'.

More in the foreground, after the valets, came the courtiers of every species: 'The great majority of them, that is to say the fools, *drew sighs from their heels*, and with wandering and dry eyes lauded Monseigneur, but always with the same praise, that is to say on account of his goodness. . . . ' Then, after the fools, we have the more astute ones; there are even some who are sincerely afflicted or cast down; we see the politicians and thinkers standing in corners and reflecting upon the consequences of such an event. Others affect an air of solemnity and motionlessness, in order to disguise the little grief they feel; they are afraid of betraying themselves by too much animation or ease of manner:

'But their eyes make up for the little movement of their bodies. Changes of posture, like people sitting on half a chair or standing uncomfortably; a sort of anxiety to avoid each other, even the meeting of their eyes; the momentary accidents which happen after such meetings; a something more unrestrained in the whole person, showing through their anxiety to contain themselves and compose their countenances; a keenness, a sort of *flashing around* distinguished them in spite of themselves'.

After thus exhausting with a greedy and subtle curiosity, and an inconceivable wealth of language, all the forms, all the more or less natural or constrained postures and attitudes of this immense affliction of Versailles, he returns to his two princes and princesses in the first salon, and to the physiognomies of the first quality, which he likewise delivers over to us with all their shades of colour. To see him describing them with precise expressions to suit each particular case, we could imagine him a Hippocrates at the bed of a dying person, studying each symptom, each twist of the face, and diagnosing his malady with the authority of a master. But, in this case, the Hippocrates is unable to preserve his sang-froid; he gives vent to the joy that he feels and all his delighted curiosity, in presence of this multitude of subjects for his observation, he exclaims:

'The rapidity with which the eyes fly in all directions, *sounding the hearts of these people* in the light of this first agitation and disturbance, which has come upon them as a surprise, the

putting together of all one's observations, one's astonishment to find that some were affected less than one expected, for want of heart or a sufficiency of wit, and others more than one would have thought, *this whole collection of living objects and matters of such importance procures a pleasure for any one who is able to take it*, which, unsubstantial as it becomes, is *one of the greatest that one can enjoy in a Court* '.

Two or three humorous incidents, such as the arm of the *big sleeping Swiss* which is suddenly seen protruding quite near the sofa, or the apparition of Madame, in full Court dress, weeping and howling at the top of her voice without knowing why, add variety and diversion to these different forms of grief; for Saint-Simon forgets nothing that is in nature. When the long night is more than half over, every one at length, exhausted with emotion and acting, retires to bed, and the most afflicted sleep the soundest; but Saint-Simon, still intoxicated with this orgy of observation, sleeps little. He is up again at seven o'clock in the morning. 'But I must confess, he remarks, that such sleeplessness is sweet, and such an awakening is *savoury*'.

The second scene that I recommend to those who would observe the working of Saint-Simon's picturesque genius and irrepressible passion, is that of the Council of the Regency and the Bed of Justice at which the Duc du Maine was degraded (26 August 1718). On that occasion too he cannot sleep for joy during the preceding nights, in his expectation of the great day which is at length to avenge him for the many insults received and the anger he has had to stifle. Observe that in this second quite dramatic scene he is the counsellor, the instigator; he has wound up the machine, and he delights in seeing it move and gradually unwind, and dealing its blows in the sight of all those who are less well informed than he, who are surprised or grieved. If he continues to show himself a great painter and an implacable observer, he is so less innocently and less disinterestedly than in the scene of the death of Monseigneur; his vindictive cruelty lets itself go too visibly and with too little unrestraint. The poor Duc du Maine and his adherents are all brought to book. When Saint-Simon once grips a person, he does not let him go; he strips him from top to toe. At the moment when, in the Council of the Regency, the

Duke of Orleans, prompted by Saint-Simon, came to announce his resolution to restore Louis' bastards to their former rank of mere Peers, and when the battery pointed against these fallen favourites is unmasked, one should read this astonishing page and see all those *sombre brown* clouds instantly gathering upon the faces of those present, the Villars, the Tallards, the Estrées, and the other members of the Council: all these diversities of shading and *sombreness* are well marked. As to Saint-Simon, who tries not to appear to be in the secret, and to act the part of the temperate and modest man in his triumph, one should hear him describe himself and confessing the almost sensual intoxication of his joy.

'Thus contained, he says, *eager to devour the expressions of all, alive to all around and on my guard against my own feelings, motionless, glued to my seat, my whole body kept under control, penetrated with the keenest and most violent emotions that joy is able to inspire, with the most entrancing agitation, with an enjoyment that had been long most immoderately and perseveringly desired, I sweated with anguish to imprison my emotions, and that very anguish was a voluptuous pleasure that I have never felt before nor since that beautiful day. How inferior are the pleasures of the senses to those of the mind, and how true it is that our ills are proportioned by the good things that put an end to them* '!

We are already only too well aware, and, if I were to carry these quotations any further to the continuation and development of these scenes, we should become more and more aware of the fact that the author does not contain himself; he overflows: that is his fault. Insatiable for emotions and unwearying in his expression of them, he soon stretches the language to its last limits. In his hands it is like a horse that has run its race: it is exhausted, but he is not, and he demands of it more than it can give him. It is inadequate to bear all his joy and all his passion.

Let us rest satisfied with the incredible confession of jubilation that we have just read, and let us boldly say: Such was this man who does not lie, who does not dissemble, who does not make himself out better than he is, and who betrays himself by his brush as well as he interprets others. There is no doubt that with the ardent and headstrong passions that he himself betrays, he must have

been mistaken more than once, he must have exceeded the measure, he must have attributed some of his own feelings to others, he must have used and abused at the same time that so rare gift of sagacity with which he was endowed. However, if he was, as he must have been on more than one occasion, unjust, excessive and rash in his attribution of defects, I do not think that his picture as a whole is to be much discounted. What he held especially in horror and was most antipathetic to, was baseness, servility, meanspiritedness, the slavish devotion of each to his own narrowest interests, the personal cabals that lacked any high aim, the neglect and the ruin of all and of the State with a sole eye to self; in a word, that which formed the chief source of corruption at Courts, and has not yet perhaps ceased to be the greatest sore of men who are gathered together in common, nay even of the so-called Constitutional, National or Popular Assemblies. Let us suppose for a moment a Saint-Simon to be, not at Versailles, but in one of those great modern Assemblies, and ask ourselves what he would see there.

So then, without pretending to answer for Saint-Simon's opinion on such or such a person, and considering it merely in proportion to the sagacious and almost animal instinct which he obeyed and which seldom led him wrong, we cannot say that on the whole he slandered his age and humanity; or, if he did so, he slandered it like *Alceste*, and with that degree of misanthropy which is the stimulus of strong minds and the colouring sap of talent.

Taking him as a whole however, Saint-Simon was not altogether a superior man, in this sense that, though he had some superior mental qualities and powers, and some uncommon gifts, he was not able to govern and distribute them, and to proportion and harmonize his views in such a way to as restore vanities or prejudices to their proper places, and to allow the light of knowledge to reign. He was, in some sort, a prey to himself, to his instincts and his talents; but they appear all the more marvellous and extraordinary.

If we had time and space for amusement, we might say a thousand curious and piquant things about him; we might laugh at his opinion of Voltaire, and of all the men of the *gown* or the *pen*; we might laugh at his aristocratic fads. I know some rather amusing satirical verses about



him, in which he is called the *attorney of the Peers, the little hussar of the Regent and of France*, and other more or less witty reprisals. But in every matter, when one has little time at one's disposal, one should come to essentials and seriousness. Saint-Simon would have desired the impossible for the Nobility of his time, already so enslaved and truncated ; with Boulainvilliers he would have liked to see it restored to influence, splendour, independence, and taking a legitimate share in the exercise of the legislative power and the sovereignty. He forgot that this Nobility, at all times very frivolous in France, and henceforth without any basis, was no more than a Court Nobility, and he was far from suspecting that, in less than twenty-five years after his death, the most knightly of them would be the first to change their idols and pay their court to Revolutions. He was indignant to see around him those types of dull and servile courtiers, that brood of Villeroy's, of Dangeaus, of d'Antins, and he did not foresee, in a near future, those other extremes which would have grieved him no less, those noblemen who had deserted to the democracy and led them to the assault, the Mirabeaus, the La Fayette's, the Lameths, and the most eccentrically democratic of them all, his own descendant. No matter. If Saint-Simon was unable at that late hour to give back to the French Nobility a political and aristocratic influence which no doubt did not come within the conditions of our national genius and our destinies, he did for them the best that he could after action, he gave them, in his own person, the greatest writer they ever produced, the proudest, the freest, the most honest, the most strongly tempered and the most dazzling pen, and this Duke and Peer, who in his own time aroused a smile of disdain, is now, between Molière and Bossuet (a little below them, I know, but certainly between the two), one of the first glories of France.

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Since this *Causerie* was written, I have drawn a fuller portrait of Saint-Simon, but on the same lines, to serve as an introduction to the correct edition of the *Memoirs*, published under the care of M. Chéruel (Hachette).

## DIDEROT.<sup>1</sup>

*Monday, January 20, 1851.*

THE last Studies which have been written on Diderot have in common that they aim at giving him his proper place, with justice, without any anger and without too much zeal. The strong qualities of his talent, of his heart, of his rich intellectual nature, are appreciated; his faults are reprov'd, explained, and the explanation in some respects attenuates them. M. Génin has shown that, in certain passages where we used to read the expression of a positive atheism, it was Diderot's impulsive publisher, Naigeon, who took upon himself to ascribe to his master opinions that he had never held, and without any ado inserted his own commentaries into the text. M. Bersot, in a philosophical discussion of Diderot's anti-religious doctrines, endeavoured to prove that the philosopher was less removed from a certain elevated conception of God than he himself believed. It often seems indeed that there is wanting in him only a way of light to light up the whole, and we should be inclined to say of Diderot's atheism what he said of those little landscapes of Vernet, on which all the objects are browned and darkened owing to the moment chosen by the painter, that of nightfall: '*Till to-morrow, when the sun is risen*'. With all this, however, one can never make of Diderot an unconscious believer, nor a sort of *Deist* according to the meaning and spirit of the word; a discussion of the subject would be besides too delicate and too intricate to be approached or entered upon by me. But I will gladly take advantage of the circumstance to say my say on Diderot from the literary and moral point of view, which is the one we prefer.

Diderot, born at Langres in 1713, the son of a cutler (as

<sup>1</sup> *Study on Diderot*, by M. Bersot, 1851. *Select Works of Diderot*, with Notice, by M. Génin, 1847.

was also Rollin), had from infancy the family feeling in a high degree, and he had it in common with his people, who came of an honest stock. He was the eldest of the family; he had a sister who was an original character with an excellent heart, a good girl who did not marry in order to be more serviceable to her father, 'vivacious, active, cheerful, resolute, quick to take offence, slow to recover, without any cares either for the present or the future, never imposed upon either by things or persons; free in her actions, still more free in her talk: a sort of *femelle Diogenes*'. We see where Diderot resembled her, and where he differed from her: she was the branch that had been left in its rude and wild state, he the grafted shoot, improved and modified by cultivation and in full bloom. He had a brother besides with whom he would seem to have had less resemblance, a man of singular humour, of a sensibility which was suppressed and constrained, rather fantastic in mind and character, a canon of Langres Cathedral, very pious, and one of the most saintly men of the diocese. Sprung from this vigorous middle-class stock, but having received, as a special gift of nature, a most expansive disposition, Diderot was the bad egg of the family, and he became its glory. He first studied with the Jesuits in his native town, who would have liked to keep him; then his father sent him to the Collège d'Harcourt in Paris. On leaving there, he lived the life of a young man of the Paris of those days (1733-1743), a life of shifts and expedients, trying many a profession without deciding for any one, accepting work from any hand, reading, studying, devouring everything with avidity, giving lessons in mathematics and learning them as he proceeded; walking in summer in the Luxembourg gardens, 'in a grey plush frock-coat, with torn ruffs and black worsted stockings darned behind with white thread'; entering the shop of Mlle Babuti, the pretty bookseller on the Quai des Augustins (who afterwards became Mme Greuze), with that *lively, eager and extravagant air* which distinguished him at that time, and saying: 'Mademoiselle, the *Tales of La Fontaine*, if you please, a Petronius . . .', and so on. Here we have an ugly side of his character to which we shall have too much occasion to recur. In a word, both before his marriage (a love marriage which he contracted at thirty), and after it, Diderot

continued to live that haphazard, hand to mouth existence, that life of shifts, of labour and continual improvisation. His genius—for he had genius, and we can give no other name to such breadth and such power of diversified faculties—took so kindly to it, that we do not know to-day whether he would have been suited for any other kind of life, and we are inclined to believe that in thus spreading himself and pouring out his mind on all sides and to all comers, he fulfilled his destiny to the best advantage.

His great work, his individual work so to say, was the *Encyclopædia*. As soon as the booksellers who had conceived the first idea of the work had laid their hand upon him, they felt indeed that they had got the right man; the idea immediately widened, assumed body and life. Diderot took it up with such eagerness and presented it in so favourable a light, that he succeeded in gaining the approval of the pious Chancellor Daguesseau, and inducing him to give his consent and patronage to the undertaking: Daguesseau was its first patron. For nearly twenty-five years (1748–1772), Diderot was, at first with d'Alembert, then alone, the support, the pillar and the Atlas as it were of this enormous undertaking, under which we see him a little bent and stooping, but always smiling and serene. The History of Philosophy, which, it is true, he treats of at second hand, the Description of the Mechanical Arts, in which he shows himself perhaps more original; from three to four thousand illustrations which were drawn under his directions, the burden and the direction of the whole work in short, were never able entirely to absorb his powers or to blunt his activity and spirits. Casting his eyes back, he uttered a sigh of regret towards the end of his life, and said: 'I know, indeed, a great number of things, but there is hardly a man who does not know his own business much better than I. This mediocrity in all branches of knowledge is the result of an unbridled curiosity and of a fortune so modest, that I have never been enabled to give myself up entirely to a single branch of human knowledge. All my life I have been obliged to follow occupations for which I was not adapted, and to leave those to which my inclination called me . . . ' I do not know whether he was not mistaken in this, and whether this continually changing diversity of subjects was not rather in accordance with his taste. He remarked

that, in his country of Langres, the changes in the atmosphere are such that within twenty-four hours one may pass through cold and hot, through calm and storm, through fine and rainy weather, and that it is difficult to believe that this changeability of climate should not affect the soul. 'So it is accustomed from tenderest childhood, he says, to turn to every wind. The head of a Langrois is on his shoulders like a weather-cock on a church steeple; it is never fixed in one point; and if it returns to the point it has left, it does not stop there. With a surprising quickness of movements, of desires, of plans, of fancies, and ideas, they are slow of speech. As for me, *I belong to my country*; but residence in the capital combined with application and industry has corrected me a little. I am constant in my tastes . . .' Constant in his tastes, I admit; but, truly, extremely changeable in his impressions, and he says so himself when face to face with his portrait by Michel Vanloo, in which he could hardly recognize himself: 'My children, I must inform you that this is not I. I had in one day a hundred different physiognomies, according to the matter that moved me: I was serene, melancholy, dreamy, tender, violent, passionate, enthusiastic; but I was never such as you see me here . . .' And he adds, for it is important that we should know him well from the beginning: 'I had a high forehead, very bright eyes, rather large features, quite the head of an ancient orator, a good nature that closely bordered on the simplicity, the rusticity of the olden times'.

Let us picture Diderot to ourselves such as he was indeed, according to the unanimous testimony of all his contemporaries, and not as he was represented by his friends the artists, Michel Vanloo and Greuze, who failed more or less to catch his likeness, so much so that the engraving after the portrait of the latter made him look like Marmontel. 'His broad forehead, open and softly rounded, Meister tells us, bore the imposing stamp of an immense, luminous and fertile intellect'. It is added that Lavater thought that he saw in it traces of a timid, unenterprising character; and there is reason to remark indeed that, in spite of his intellectual boldness, the spring of conduct and action was a little weak. With a little adroitness one could do with him what one pleased;

and, with all his sudden and rapid warmth, he lacked faith in himself. 'The profile taken as a whole, adds the same Meister, was distinguished by a character of manly and sublime beauty; the outline of the upper eyelid was full of delicacy; the habitual expression of his eyes was soft and tender; but when his head began to get warm, they sparkled with fire. His mouth breathed an interesting blend of shrewdness, grace and simplicity'. There we have the man who was quite himself only when he was heated and animated, which was so often the case. Then the carriage of his head showed 'much nobility, energy and dignity'. He who has known Diderot only through his writings, assert all his contemporaries, has never known him.<sup>1</sup> So affable and open with all, he was timid in society, in the great world; he was never able to become acclimatized to the salons of Mme Geoffrin, Mme Du Deffand, Mme Necker and other fair ladies. He appeared there sometimes, but he left as soon as he could. Mme d'Épinay, assisted by Grimm, tried very hard to tame him at her house; she deserved to succeed on account of her keen appreciation of him. 'Four lines of this man give me more food for thought, she said, and occupy my mind more than a complete work of our pretended fine wits'. The Empress of Russia, the great Catherine, likewise tamed the philosopher by dint of superiority and good grace; he paid her a visit, as we know, at Saint Petersburg, and we are not sure that he did not sometimes treat her, when he was talking, as a comrade. 'Go on, she would say to him, when she happened to see him hesitate to express himself rather freely, *among men* everything is permitted'. In the farewell evening that he spent with her, he once, when she spoke some kind and friendly words to him, began to *weep hot tears*, 'and she nearly did the same', he assures us. One had to expect these natural outbursts with him, and if he had suppressed them, he would have appeared somewhat affected. He was only entirely at his ease when in familiar

<sup>1</sup>In his letters written from Paris (1754), the President de Brogues relates how he made Diderot's acquaintance through Buffon's introduction. 'I wish to know, he said, this furious metaphysical head'; and when he has seen him, he adds: 'He is an amiable fellow, very mild, very pleasant, a great philosopher, a great talker, but he goes off into perpetual digressions. He digressed twenty-five times yesterday during the four hours he was in my room. Oh! how much clearer Buffon is than all these people!'

and intimate company, and then he would open out with abandon, with his rich, powerful, coloured and affectionate talents, which captivated all who listened to him : it was impossible to know him and to hate him.

Somebody said of the Abbé Morellet, a strict observer of method and accuracy, that, even when he walked, ' he always went with his shoulders drawn in before him in order to be nearer to himself '. This attitude was the very opposite of Diderot's, whom we picture to ourselves with his head forward, his arms extended, his chest open, ever ready to get outside of himself and to embrace you, if he has the least liking for you, at the first meeting. The attitude of the man was here the very image of his mind.

If the *Encyclopedia* was the social and principal work of Diderot in his time and his hour, his chief glory in our eyes to-day is that he was the creator of sincere, eager and eloquent criticism : it is this side of him that survives and must be ever dear to all of us, journalists and improvers on every kind of subject. Let us salute in him our father and the first model of the kind.

Before Diderot, criticism in France had been exact, careful and sharp with Bayle, elegant and exquisite with Fénelon, honest and useful with Rollin ; I will discreetly omit the Frélons and the Des Fontaines. But nowhere had it been alive, fruitful, penetrating, and, if I may say so, it had not found its soul. It was Diderot who first gave it a soul. Naturally inclined to overlook the faults and to be fired with enthusiasm for the beauties, ' I am more affected, he said, by the charms of virtue than by the deformity of vice : I insensibly turn away from the bad, and *rush to meet the good*. If there is a beautiful spot in a work, a character, a picture, a statue, it is upon that that my eyes are fixed ; I see only that, I remember only that, the rest is almost forgotten. You may judge of the effect upon me when the whole is beautiful . . . ' This hospitable, universally indulgent and enthusiastic disposition was doubtless not without its danger. Somebody said of him that he was singularly fortunate in two respects, ' in that he had never met with a bad man or a bad book '. For if the book was bad, he remade it, and unconsciously ascribed to the author some of his own inventions. Like the alchemist he found gold in the crucible because he had

put it there. I point out the drawback and the abuse. To him, however, belongs the honour of having first introduced in France the fruitful criticism of *beauties*, and substituted it for the criticism of *faults*; and, in this sense, Chateaubriand himself, in that part of the *Génie du Christianisme* which eloquently treats of literary criticism, only follows in the path that Diderot had opened.

The Abbé Arnaud said to Diderot: 'You have the inverse of the dramatic talent: the latter should transform itself into all the characters, and you transform them all into yourself'. But if Diderot was anything but a dramatic poet, if he was in no way equal to that kind of sovereign creation and entirely impersonal transformation, he had on the other hand in the highest degree that power of *semi-metamorphosis*, which is the diversion and the triumph of criticism, and which consists in putting oneself in the place of the author, and at the point of view of the subject to be examined, in reading every work *according to the spirit which dictated it*. He excelled in assuming for a time and at will that spirit of others, in drawing inspiration from it, and often more successfully than the other had done himself, in becoming warmly interested in it, not only with his head but with his heart; and then he becomes the great modern journalist, the Homer of the species, intelligent, warm, expansive, eloquent, never in his own house, always in that of others, or, if he received them in his own house and in the bosom of his own idea, he is then the most open, the most hospitable of minds, the most friendly to all and everything, and giving all the world, readers as well as authors and artists, not a lesson, but a feast.

Such he shows himself in his admirable *Salons de Peinture*. One day Grimm, who used to write news of our literature and fine arts to several northern sovereigns, asked Diderot to write him an account of the Salon of 1761. Diderot had hitherto interested himself in many things, but never in fine arts in particular. Commanded by his friend, he bethought himself, for the first time, to look at, to examine, what he had so far only glanced at; and the result of his observations and reflections was the birth of those pages of wonderful causeries, which really created the criticism of fine arts in France.



I know of one objection that is ordinarily raised against these fine treatises on the arts, and that is particularly suggested by these *Salons* of Diderot. It is that they are *beside* the subject, that they treat of it from the literary, the dramatic point of view, which is the point of view dear to the French. Mme Necker wrote to Diderot: 'I continue to find infinite entertainment in reading your *Salon*: *I love painting only in poetry*; and it is into poetry that you have translated all the works, even the most commonplace, of our modern painters'. There we have the praise which, according to some people of taste, is the greatest criticism. 'In fact, say these latter, the peculiarity of the French is that they judge everything through the intellect, even forms and colours. It is true that, as there is no language which is able to express the subtleties of form or the variety of the effects of colour, as soon as we try to talk about them, we are reduced, for want of the power of expressing what we feel, to describing other sensations which can be understood by everybody'. Diderot escapes this reproach less than anybody, and the pictures he sees are, most frequently, only a pretext and a motive for those that he remakes and imagines. Every article of his is almost invariably composed of two parts: in the first, he describes the picture he has before his eyes; in the second, he proposes his own. Talkers of this kind, however, when they are, like him, imbued with their subject, penetrated with a keen feeling for art and the things they speak of, are useful and interesting at the same time: they guide you, they draw your attention, and whilst we follow and listen to them, whilst with them we pick out this and leave that, the sense of form and colour, if we are gifted with it, is aroused in us, is created and intensified: we imperceptibly become in our turn good judges and connoisseurs, from secret reasons which we could not express and that are beyond the power of speech.

We perceive at once to what extent Diderot is a *littérateur* in his manner of judging pictures. An artist painted a picture representing *Telemachus entertained by Calypso*: the scene takes place at table; the young hero is telling the story of his adventures, and Calypso is offering him a peach. Diderot thinks that this detail of Calypso's offering a peach is a *piece of folly*, and that Telemachus

is much more intelligent than the nymph and her painter, for he continues the story of his adventures without taking the peach that is offered him. But if this peach were well offered, if the light fell upon it in a certain manner, if the expression of the nymph corresponded to it, if in a word the picture had been painted by a Titian or a Veronese, that peach might have been a masterpiece, in spite of the *folly* that the mind thinks it sees ; for here, in a picture, the story of the adventures that one does not hear, and that is in danger of being interrupted by the offer of the peach, is only very secondary ; our ears are not concerned, and we are all eyes.

In a great number of cases, however, Diderot has some correct and strikingly true remarks, expressed less as a critic than as a painter. Addressing M. Vien, for example, who painted a Psyche holding her lamp in her hand, and coming upon the sleeping Cupid, he says :

' Oh ! how little intelligence our painters have ! how little they know of nature ! Psyche's head ought to be bent forward towards Cupid, the rest of her body holding back, as if she were advancing to a place she is afraid of entering, and ready to run away ; one foot firmly set, the other just touching the ground. And that lamp, is it likely that she would allow the light to fall on Cupid's eyes ? Would she not rather hold it aside, shading the light with her hand ? It would be an occasion, besides, for throwing a very interesting light upon the picture. These people do not know that the eyelids have a sort of transparency ; they have never seen a mother coming at night with a lamp in her hand to see her child in the cradle, and afraid of wakening it '.

But where Diderot is especially excellent to listen to, even by painters, is when he insists upon the power of unity in a composition, upon the harmony and the effect of an ensemble, upon the *general conspiracy of movements* ; he instinctively understands that vast and broad unity, and continually comes back to it ; he insists upon a concordance of tones and expressions, an easy connexion between the accessories and the whole, a natural congruity. Speaking of a dying St. Benedict receiving the viaticum, by Deshayes, he points out that if the artist had represented the saint a little nearer to his end, ' with arms a little extended, his head thrown back, with death on his lips and ecstasy on his countenance ', by reason of this

single circumstance, changing the expression of the principal figure, it would have been necessary to alter the expressions of all the other figures, to indicate more commiseration, to overspread them with a more tender emotion : ' Here is a piece of painting, he adds, by means of which we might make it palpable to the eyes of young students, that by altering a single circumstance we alter all the others, otherwise the truth disappears. It might illustrate an excellent chapter on *the power of unity*'. In all this Diderot is a great critic, and in that order of general criticism that no art, under the pretext of technique, can escape : ' It is my opinion, he says, that when a painter takes up the brush, he should have some strong, ingenious, delicate or piquant idea, and set himself some effect, some impression . . . There are very few artists who have ideas, and there is hardly a single one who can dispense with them . . . There is no alternative: either interesting ideas, an original subject, or an astonishing execution'.

This *astonishing execution*, which is the condition without which the idea itself, after all, cannot live, this unique and superior execution which is the stamp of every great artist, Diderot is the first to feel, when he meets with it, and to interpret for us in words that are themselves astonishing, singular, in a vocabulary that is quite new and of which he was, we might say, the inventor in our language. There are certain revealed reflections in his style. And, in general, all the powers of improvisation, of quick and picturesque imagination, with which he is endowed ; all his wealth of profound, bold and ingenious ideas ; the love of nature, the country and the family ; even his sensuality, his pronounced taste for touching and describing shapes, his sense of colour, his *sense of the flesh*, of life and blood, ' which is the despair of colourists', and which flowed into his pen, all these precious qualities of Diderot are of use to him in these *flying sheets* which are still his surest title to fame with posterity.

He surpassed himself whenever he spoke of Vernet and Greuze. Greuze is Diderot's ideal artist ; he is a sincere and affectionate painter, the painter of the family and the drama, touching and honest, slightly sensual and moral at the same time. So, when Diderot comes across him, he clings to him, he translates, interprets, explains him,

he adds to him and does not let him go : ' I am perhaps a little long-winded, he says, but if you knew how it amuses me to bore you ! I am like all the other bores in the world '. The analyses or rather the paintings that Diderot has given us of the *Village Bride*, of the *Girl weeping over her Dead Bird*, of the *Well-beloved Mother*, etc., are master-pieces and little apposite poems, suggested by the pictures. Diderot is fond of saying of his painters : ' He *paints broadly*, he *draws broadly* ' ; he does the same in criticism : he spreads himself out broadly. His criticism is effusive. Even when describing with delight every family idyll of Greuze, he finds occasion to bring in his own tones. In his analysis of the *Weeping Girl* he does more, he introduces quite an elegy of his own invention. This young girl, who seems to be weeping over her bird, has her secret, and is weeping for something else besides : ' Oh ! what a beautiful hand ! exclaims the enraptured critic in his consideration of the picture, what a beautiful hand ! what beautiful arms ! Look at the truth of the details of these fingers, and these dimples, and this softness, and this tint of redness with which the pressure of the head has coloured the ends of her delicate fingers, and the charm of it all. We might approach this hand to kiss it, if we did not respect this child in her grief '. And, whilst bidding himself respect this childish grief, he approaches her ; he begins to address her, he raises the veil of mystery as softly as he can : ' But, little one, your grief is very deep, very deliberate. What means this dreamy and melancholy air ? What ? for a bird ! You are not weeping, you are afflicted ; and your affliction is accompanied by thought. Come, little one, open your heart to me : tell me the truth ; is it indeed the death of this bird that makes you retreat so sadly and so forcibly within yourself ? . . . ' And he continues this note of elegy through the idyll. Thus the picture is for him only a pretext for revery, for poetry. Diderot is the king and the god of those half-poets who become and appear entirely poets in criticism : they need only an external fulcrum and an impetus. Observe that in his analysis of this and other pictures of Greuze, Diderot delights in pointing out and introducing into their morality a light vein of sensuality, a vein which they may possibly contain, but which he certainly loves to trace, to follow with his finger, and which he is tempted

to magnify and exaggerate rather than to overlook. The swellings of the bosom, the softness of the contours, even in these family pictures, even in these brides and mothers, he continually recurs to, regarding and describing them with complacency, not like a critic or an artist, nor like a refined libertine (Diderot is not perverse), but like a natural and material man, who is at times a little gross. That is a weak side in him, a vulgar and even a slightly debased side. This excellent man, so cordial, elevated and warm, this critic, so animated, so ingenious, so shrewd, who has in addition a mania for preaching *morals*, is unable to confine himself, in presence of an artistic object, to raising and fixing our idea of the beautiful, or even to satisfying our impression of sensibility : he goes further, he disturbs our senses a little. At times, therefore, when you see on his brow a reflection of the light of Plato, do not trust your eyes, but look again, and you will always see the hoof of the Satyr.

Whoever reads Diderot will easily recognize what we are trying to point out, and of what it is difficult to produce proofs. Here, however, is one example among a thousand, and one that may be cited. Diderot is speaking of a young landscape-painter, Loucherbourg, who starts on his career with some rustic compositions, full of freshness : ' Courage, young man ! he exclaims ; thou hast gone further than thy age permits . . . Thou hast a charming companion who ought to make thee settle down. Do not quit thy studio except to consult nature . . . ' We wonder what this *companion* of the young Loucherbourg has to do with the matter. But Diderot persists and does not fail to return to the point : ' Live in the country with her, he continues ; go and see the sun rise and set . . . Quit thy bed at early morning, in spite of the young and charming woman who lies at thy side . . . ' The description of the landscape which follows these words may be ever so charming in its purity, and quite overspread as it were with dew and light, yet we cannot help feeling that this peep into the marital alcove, which is several times repeated, is misplaced and almost indecent. It is perpetually thus with Diderot. In the midst of his charming, delightful and pleasing qualities, there is a habitual indelicacy and sensuality, a free and bourgeois *deshabille*, by reason of which he is greatly inferior to that other great art-critic, Lessing.

But it would be unjust to insist too much upon this point, for he has so many other good points. His own words on sketches may apply to himself and his light pieces : ' The sketch commonly has an ardour that is not possessed by the finished picture. It represents the artist's moment of heat, his pure verve, without any mingling of the dressing that reflection adds to the whole ; it is the soul of the painter freely spread over the canvas. The pen of the poet, the pencil of the clever draughtsman, have an appearance of playful haste. Rapid thought characterizes a thing with a single touch. Now, the more vague the expression of the arts, the more is imagination at its ease '. There we have Diderot the critic and the painter caught in the very act of producing one of his quick sketches. He said somewhere of La Tour's pastels, ' that a brush of the wing of Time would suffice to carry away their dust ', and to make the artist more than a mere name. Many years have passed, and La Tour's pastels still live ; Diderot's sketches live likewise.

On Vernet and the seven pictures which that painter exhibited in the Salon of 1767, Diderot wrote quite a *poem* ; I can find no other word for it. At the moment when he begins the analysis of these landscapes and marine pieces of Vernet, he supposes himself to have been obliged to leave for the country, for a country near the sea, and to be contemplating several real scenes, as a compensation for what he has missed seeing in the Salon. And these scenes he relates and describes with all the particulars of the conversations, the promenades, and the discussions of every kind which are carried on by several speakers. They discuss nature, art, and their delicate connexions, they discuss society, the universal order, and the point of view relative to human sight. Diderot sows in profusion the thousand seeds of ideas which fill his mind. Then suddenly, at the end, his secret, which, two or three times, was at the point of his pen, is out, and these natural landscapes which he has described so well turn out to be simply Vernet's canvases which he delighted in imagining and realizing on the spot, putting himself in the situation and the very inspiration of the artist who had composed them. This mode of criticism was quite a creation.

In his *Salons* Diderot discovered the only and true way

of speaking to the French on the fine arts, of initiating them into this new sentiment, through the intellect, through conversation, of making them comprehend colour through ideas. How many, before reading Diderot, might have said with Mme Necker : ' I never saw in pictures anything but flat and lifeless colours ; his imagination has given them relief and life ; I owe to his genius almost a new sense '. This new and acquired sense has since then been strongly developed in us ; let us hope that it has now become quite natural to us.<sup>1</sup>

Diderot was not less helpful and profitable to the artists than he was to the public. It is related that David, a great head of a school if not a great painter, never spoke of Diderot without acknowledgment. David's beginnings had been painful, and he had succumbed as many as two or three times in his first struggles. Diderot, who frequented the studios, comes to David's : he sees a picture that the painter is finishing ; he admires it, he explains it, he sees in it thoughts, grand intentions. David listens and confesses that all these fine ideas had never occurred to him. ' What ! exclaims Diderot, you worked unconsciously and by instinct ; that is better still ! ' And he motives his admiration still more fully. This warmth of welcome, coming from a celebrated man, put heart into David, and was a blessing for his talent.

Diderot left a number of little hastily thrown-off writings, little stories, tales, sketches, which it has been customary to call masterpieces. A masterpiece ! there is always a little complaisance in using this word with Diderot. The masterpiece properly speaking, the finished, definitive and complete piece, in which taste gives the measure of the movement and the sentiment, is not in Diderot's way : the superior quality, everywhere diffused in him, is nowhere concentrated, nowhere framed and clearly radiating. He is rather, as we have seen, the man of *sketches*. In the little purposely written pieces, such as the *Eulogy of Richardson* or the *Regrets on my old Dressing-gown*, he exhibits charm, some happy ideas, some well-invented expressions ; but in places we perceive a pompousness,

<sup>1</sup> Diderot's *Salons* did not appear during his lifetime, having been first printed in the collection of his *Works* published by Naigeon (1798) ; but they were known in society, and copies of them were in circulation, as we see by Mme Necker's letter.

and their naturalness is spoiled for me by his apostrophes. Here and there are whiffs of bombast. From this side he lends himself rather to caricature, and his contemporaries did not neglect the opportunity in the portraits, generally *overcharged*, which they drew of him. Where Diderot is entirely and naïvely successful, is when he has not prepared himself, when he has no aim whatever, when his thought escapes him, when the printer is there urging him and waiting ; or again when he is expecting the postman and writes in a hurry, on a tavern table, a letter to his lady friend. It is in his *Correspondence* with this friend, Mlle Voland, and in his *Salons* written for Grimm, that we find his most delightful pages, the frank and rapid sketches in which he lives again his whole life.

And you must not think that, because he writes rapidly, he writes at random. His style, in its most rapid passages, is learned, rhythmical, full of those effects of harmony which correspond to the most secret shades of feeling and thought. It is full of reflections of nature and verdure ; infinitely more so even than the style of Buffon and Jean-Jacques. Diderot was an innovator in language, and introduced into it colours of the palette and the rainbow : he already sees nature through the studio and the spectacles of the painter. I should praise it still more if it had not been overdone since.

*Rameau's Nephew* has been greatly lauded. Goethe, always full of superior conceptions and prescriptions, tried to see in it a design, a composition, a moral : I confess that I find it difficult to see in it any lofty aim and any connectedness. I find in it a thousand bold and profound ideas, true perhaps, often extravagant and licentious, so feeble a contradiction that it seems like a complicity between the two persons of the dialogue, views that are perpetually hazarded, and no conclusion, or, what is worse, a final impression that is equivocal. To this work, if to any, may be applied, I think, the words which the Chevalier de Chastellux applied to another of Diderot's productions, and which may be applied more or less to almost all his works : ' They are ideas which have become intoxicated, and started running after each other '.

In his old age Diderot asked himself whether he had employed his life well, and if he had not rather wasted it. Reading Seneca's *Treatise On the Brevity of Life*, and that



third chapter in which the reader is so sharply taken to account: 'Come, call to mind thy days and thy years, make them render an account! Tell us how much of that time thou hast allowed to be robbed by a creditor, by a mistress, by a patron, by a client . . . How many people have not pillaged thy life, when thou didst not even feel what thou wast losing!' Thus recalled to an examination of his conscience, all the commentary that Diderot wrote was: 'I have never read this chapter without a blush, *it is my story*'. Many years before, he had said to himself: 'I am not conscious of having yet employed the half of my powers; I have hitherto only trifled away my time'. He could say the same thing when he was dying. But, as a corrective and an alleviation of these ill-stifed regrets of the writer and the artist, the philosopher in him and the moral man replied: 'My life is not stolen from me, I give it; and what better can I do than grant a portion of it to him who esteems me sufficiently to solicit this present?' It was with a like feeling that he somewhere wrote these admirable and human words:

'A pleasure that I cannot share gives me little enjoyment and lasts a very short time. It is for myself and my friends that I read, that I reflect, that I write, that I meditate, that I understand, that I look, that I feel. In their absence, my devotion refers everything to them. I continually think of their happiness. If I am struck by the beauty of a line, they shall know it. If I have come across a beautiful trait, I promise myself to let them know of it. If I witness an enchanting sight, I unconsciously put it into words for their benefit. I have devoted to them the use of all my senses and all my powers; and that is perhaps the reason why everything is exaggerated, everything is a little enriched in my imagination and my speech; they sometimes make it a reproach to me, the ungrateful ones!'

We who are among his friends, of whom he thought vaguely from afar and for whom he wrote, we will not be ungrateful. Whilst regretting that we meet in him too often that touch of exaggeration which he himself acknowledges, a want of discretion and sobriety, a certain licence in manners and speech, and lapses from good taste, we render homage to his bonhomie, his sympathy, his intellectual cordiality, to his acuteness and to the richness of his views and his colours, to the breadth and the suavity of

his touches, and to that adorable freshness the secret of which he preserved throughout his incessant labour. For all of us Diderot is a man whom it is a comfort to see and consider. He is the first great writer in point of time who decidedly belongs to the modern democratic society. He points out the road and sets the example: to be or not to be a member of Academies, but to write for the public, to address all, to improvise, to hasten continually, to go to the real, to the fact, even though we adore revery; to give, give, give again, though we never gather; *to wear out rather than rust*, that is his motto. That is what he did to the last, with energy, with devotion, with a sometimes painful sense of this continual waste. And yet, through it all, he contrived, without too much striving, to save a few of all those scattered things and make them durable, and he teaches us how we may go down to posterity and the future, and escape, though in pieces, from the shipwreck of every day.

## FONTENELLE <sup>1</sup>

*Monday, January 27, 1851.*

M. FLOURENS, one of the two Permanent Secretaries of the Academy of Sciences, had the happy idea of writing in some detail the story of his predecessors, not their biography, but the history of their labours and opinions. In recent years he has published a series of Studies which are as remarkable for their clearness of expression as for the elegant simplicity of their style, on Georges Cuvier, on Fontenelle, on Buffon, who, though not a Permanent Secretary, was worthy of being one. M. Flourens promises to continue this series, which is devoted to popularizing the methods of the celebrated savants, and which, going back through the most prominent names, forms a very good complement to the Eulogies, which he is charged to produce annually, of recent deceased Academicians. We have the pleasure and facility of taking him for our guide on this occasion in what we shall try to say about Fontenelle.

There are two very distinct Fontenelles, although, in a careful study, we have no trouble in always finding the one in the very midst of the other. There is the witty, trifling, affected, dandified Fontenelle, the insipid author of Eclogues and Operas, the editor of the *Mercur galant*, at war or in controversy with Racine, Despréaux, La Fontaine; the Fontenelle who is lauded by Vizé and scourged by La Bruyère; and through this primitive Fontenelle, with his slender wit and his detestable taste, we see another revealing himself very early and breaking away slowly and patiently, but firmly and steadily; the disciple of Descartes in intellectual freedom and width of horizon, the man who is most free from every preconceived idea, from every prejudice in the order of thought and in

<sup>1</sup> *Fontenelle*, by M. Flourens, 1847.

matters of the understanding ; comprehending the modern world and the partially new instrument of exact and perfected reasoning which it demands, using it with ingenuity, with accuracy and precision, investing it with a charm that pardons its rigour and reconciles to it the least serious ; in a word, there is the Fontenelle, not of the ladies' boudoirs or the Opera, but of the Academy of Sciences, the first and worthiest mouthpiece of those learned bodies which he himself conceived in all their grandeur and their universality when he called them the States-General of literature and intelligence. It is this latter Fontenelle that M. Flourens has presented to us, quite cleansed and purified of his bad taste, whose bust he has as it were inaugurated. M. Flourens has confined himself to the great mind in Fontenelle. We will go back a little and consider the man as a whole.

Fontenelle, born at Rouen in February 1657, was, as is well known, a nephew of the Corneilles through his mother. At first sight it seems to be a piece of irony on the part of nature to have made him the nephew of the man who created those heroic souls of Polyeucte, of the elder Horace, and so many other impetuous and sublime-hearted characters ; for he was the coolest and most even soul, and the most devoid of any fire or passion, that ever existed. Still he was very like his mother, that own sister of the Corneilles ; he said, with that indifference which characterized him in everything, and which was not affected even by filial respect : 'My father was a fool, but my mother was a woman of some intelligence ; she was a Quietist and a gentle little woman ; she often said to me : *My son, you will be damned* ; but that did not cause her any uneasiness'. In order to establish some point of resemblance between Fontenelle and his illustrious uncle, a single remark is essential, and I surrender it to those who are fond of meditating over these delicate connexions. With all his lofty qualities the great Corneille had, I will not say a great deal of cleverness, but a prodigious amount of ingenuity ; when they are not passionate and majestic, and even then, when once they have launched their sublime word, his characters continue to argue, and they do so with subtilty and to excess ; they speak from the head ; the brain with them takes the place of the heart ; they refine upon ideas and things and extract

their quintessence. Let us make a supposition for a single moment: take from the great Corneille all his warmth, all the inspiration of his heart and soul, and ask yourselves what will be left of him with his dry and cool faculty for reasoning and making nice distinctions. In Thomas Corneille already these subordinate and purely intellectual qualities of his illustrious brother showed themselves more openly and, so to say, in the foreground, being no longer held in check and gathered together as it were under the protection of genius; but, in Thomas, there still mingled with them some verve and poetic fire. Now, in the case of Fontenelle, the whole man was made up of these qualities of pure cleverness and ingenuity, without a remnant of warmth. In him the brain was everything, and nature, which had doubly endowed his noble uncle, had here entirely forgotten the heart.

We see then in Fontenelle, almost from his childhood, an already complicated and very precise *bel esprit*, writing clever and ingenious Latin verses, then very gallant French poems, with no inclination except for matters of the intelligence and thought, bringing to them a spirit of careful analysis, a rare and delicate expression.<sup>1</sup> He was young when he was first in Paris, and he paid several visits to the capital after he was eighteen; but he did not settle there for good until about 1687, at the age of thirty. His first essays and his first tone had a distinctively provincial *cachet*. From Villon to Molière, Voltaire and Beaumarchais the Parisians did not speak like that. Born in a poetic and middle-class family, whose celebrity dated back before the reign of Louis XIV, Fontenelle remained a little behind-hand from the literary point of view, whilst at the same time we shall see that he was singularly advanced from the philosophic point of view.

His uncle and godfather, Thomas Corneille, guided his first steps in the journals of the time (*Le Mercure galant*) and in the drama. Racine and Boileau laughed at this newly-arrived provincial, this *précieux* and belated Norman, who came to town by the coach as if on purpose to be hissed with his musk-perfumed tragedy, or to be applauded for a sonnet *à la Oronte*. However, in the very first prose

<sup>1</sup> On Fontenelle's beginnings, on his family and on his life in general, some new and precise particulars may be found in the *Biographie de Fontenelle*, by M. Charma (1846).

work that he published (the *Nouveaux Dialogues des Morts*, 1683), Fontenelle's philosophic spirit began to show itself and to give pledges of what he would some day be. Under its cold, but ingenious and uncommon form were found some free and emancipated thoughts upon the follies of humanity, an impartial sagacity in discovering them throughout the different ages, beliefs and costumes. The famous quarrel upon the respective superiority of the Ancients or the Moderns was already begun and on the eve of coming to a head. In his Dialogue between Socrates and Montaigne, Fontenelle touched upon it with a few superior strokes worthy of a Saint-Evremond. But Boileau had not sufficient sang-froid and philosophy to seek and relish a sane thought when not sanely expressed : and Fontenelle, at his entry into society, offered his truths with bonbon-box in his hand, just as one might offer sweets or lozenges. Or, if you prefer it, it was philosophy translated into a minuet to the tunes of M. de Benserade.

The *Lettres diverses de M. le Chevalier d'Her . . .*, which Fontenelle published in 1683, at the same time as his *Dialogues of the Dead*, are pure and adulterated Benserade, and they appeared to have been purposely written to give his enemies an occasion for an easy triumph. One cannot know this first Fontenelle and what he was in respect of his inherent and instinctive taste, without having read these *Lettres* of the rankest and most consummate of *précieux*. Here we have the ideal of Fontenelle's imagination, the flowers of his spring ; and what a spring ! All is painted, rouged and musk-scented, and the perfume it exhales smells of the grocer's shop. They are Letters in the style of Voiture, addressed to various persons, on subjects designedly chosen which lend themselves to sentiment or railery. Fontenelle has a singular way of talking of love-making, of arguing about it, of drawing it out thread by thread, in every minute particular, of explaining its economy and its *ménage* (that is just the word he uses). He is in no haste at first ; his mind is quite satisfied with slow progress : ' I will wait fifteen or twenty years if you wish, writes the Chevalier to the fair ladies his correspondents . . . Time is no object with me in view of such pretty ladies as you are. Shall it be years ? Well ! let it be years. I cannot find anything more agreeable to do . . . I will drive your lassitude to madness'. Fontenelle feels

early that he has a good stock of years, and, in the sieges he undertakes, he says to himself that he can wait. For a few really pretty and delicate touches that we come across in these Letters, we could find hundreds which might be described as pure Mascarille; for example: '*Love is the income of beauty, and he who looks upon beauty without love withholds from it its income in a way that cries for vengeance*'. After this love which is the income and annuity due to love, there follow a number of particulars about *payment* in the style of a notary: 'You know that, when one pays, one is glad to *get a receipt or receive an acknowledgment* of what one has paid. I *pay off* the love that I owe you, but at the same time I make a declaration that I am *paying it off*'. Let us not forget that in Fontenelle the Norman still betrays himself and shows through the lover, the matter-of-fact man who knows the price of things and who aims at something substantial. So love, in these Letters, is treated by addition and subtraction; he brings in *receipts and acknowledgments*, as we have seen; in another place he also takes account of *bad debts*.—But, it may be said, what is the object of remarking these faults? They were afterwards covered over and consigned to oblivion by Fontenelle's great mind.—By no means. Take Fontenelle at the most elevated and majestic moment that you can, take him when delivering his Eulogy of Newton, in that important discourse of which M. Flourens has so well indicated the superior parts. After the lucid statement of his systems, after many a simple and touching biographical detail, how does Fontenelle think of terminating and summing up his Notice? 'He (Newton) left, he said, personal property of about thirty-two thousand pounds sterling, that is to say seven hundred thousand pounds in our coin. Leibniz, his adversary, also died rich, but much less rich, and with a rather considerable sum in reserve. These rare examples, both of them foreigners, seem to merit that we should not forget them'. This matter-of-fact conclusion, which so strangely crowns the tribute paid to the greatest modern scientific genius, will not astonish those who have noted in the *Lettres du Chevalier d'Her* . . . all the financial computations and comparisons that the young Fontenelle lavishly introduced into matters of love and sentiment.

He carried these calculations into everything and made no concealment of it. In his little treatise *Of Happiness*, he recommends us, before becoming attached to external objects, to make a valuation of the pleasures and pains they may return, and only to allow those things to take a hold upon us from which, after a thorough calculation, we have more to hope than to fear: 'It is only a question of calculation, he says, and Wisdom should always have counters in her hand'. Counters to count the points. That is his ideal of philosophy. This saying of Vauvenargues can never be better understood than after reading the first writings of Fontenelle: 'To have good taste it is necessary to have soul'. With all the intellect in the world, Fontenelle lacks taste, because the heart and the soul are absent and mute in him, because the *pectus* and the *affectus* (as the Ancients would say) never speak to him. Taste, a kind of taste, only comes to him later, by dint of reflection and ingenuity.

The three or four Letters of the Chevalier d'Her . . . , which turn upon the *clandestine marriage* of a supposed cousin, offer another characteristic feature of Fontenelle's youth. He imagines a cousin of the Chevalier to be obliged to conceal for a time the marriage she has contracted with a worthy gentleman, in order not to offend an old aunt of the latter, from whom they expect a fat inheritance (always thinking of finances). But one should see how the Chevalier, that is to say Fontenelle, jests about this secret marriage which will force this modest cousin to play a mysterious part, hypocritically to keep up her first appearance: 'You will still belong to the amiable troop of spinsters who will appear, and perhaps be, like you'. She will receive her husband in secret, like a lover, and she will have to treat him with reserve and ceremony before the world: 'There are some *vagabonds of virtue* that I propose to you', he writes to her. And he continues to jest with persistence, and sometimes with indelicacy, on this equivocal situation. A gay, light, sly touch might be pardonable; but four letters over which he spreads his grain of licentiousness, that is too much. Somebody remarked very truly, speaking of these Letters on the *clandestine marriage*, that it is always French and Gallic ribaldry that absorbs all the interest; but here the ribaldry is iced.



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We should be too severe to dwell any longer on this early period. But how well we can understand, after reading this work of Fontenelle, the epigrams of Racine, Boileau and Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, at his expense, and how well we are able to recognize his early physiognomy in this Portrait which La Bruyère drew of him :

' *Ascagne* is a sculptor, *Hégion* a founder, *Eschine* a fuller and *Cydias* (i.e. Fontenelle) a *bel esprit* ; it's his profession. He has a signboard, a workshop, he works to order, and he has his journeymen working under him . . . Prose, verse, whichever you please, he is equally successful in either. Ask him to write a letter of *condolence*, or on an *absence*, he will undertake it ; or you may go into his shop and buy them ready-made—there is a stock to choose from. He has a friend who has no other business in life but to promise, at long notice, to bring him to a certain society, and to introduce him at last in those houses as a rare man of exquisite conversation ; and there, just as the musician sings and the lute-player plays his lute before the people to whom he has been promised, *Cydias*, having coughed, turned up his sleeve, extended his hand and opened his fingers, solemnly delivers his quintessential thoughts and his sophisticated arguments '.

Read the whole of that Portrait, follow that conversation of *Cydias*-Fontenelle whom La Bruyère described so well as he appeared in society, with that first varnish of youth and in all the lustre of his first dressing, already entirely himself with his patience and his tone, never eager to speak and interrupt, calmly waiting till everybody has had his turn, then gracefully dealing out, with a half smile, contradictions and paradoxes that La Bruyère regards as impertinences, that might often be truths or might at least lead up to them, which La Bruyère omits to say. This Portrait of Fontenelle by La Bruyère conveys a great lesson to us : it shows us how much a skilful painter, a keen critic, may err whilst telling the truth, but not the whole truth, how little he may suspect that, in this odd and complex human organization, a defect, an eccentricity and an absurdity, even the most marked, is never incompatible with a superior quality.

However, before finally pronouncing judgment against La Bruyère, I would request you to read, in the first volume of the *Nouveaux Mélanges* of Mme Necker, the extract of a conversation of Mme Geoffrin on Fontenelle.

Nobody certainly knew the definitive Fontenelle better than Mme Geoffrin, who passed her life with him and was the executrix of his will. Well ! the essential features which she assigns to this exceptional nature are, in many respects, precisely those that we have seen drawn and engraved by La Bruyère : ' He never laughed, says Mme Geoffrin ; I said to him one day : Monsieur de Fontenelle, have you never laughed ?—No, replied he, I have never uttered a *ha ! ha ! ha !*—That was his idea of laughing : he only smiled at delicate things ; but he knew no strong feeling '. I will presume to add, to adopt the tone of the subject, that, if he never uttered a *ha ! ha ! ha !* he never uttered an *oh ! oh !* that is to say that he never admired. ' He had never wept, continues Mme Geoffrin ; he had never been angry ; he had never run ; and, as he did nothing from sentiment, he never adopted others' impressions. *He had never interrupted anybody ; he would listen to the end without losing a word ; he was not in a hurry to speak ;* and, if you had accused him of anything, he would have listened all day without saying a word '. We see how the Fontenelle of ninety and La Bruyère's Fontenelle of thirty, the one drawn by an enemy, and the other by a friend, are still the same person. I will not quote any more from this most striking of portraits, which is taken from the original. We see laid bare that purely intellectual nature, which was destitute so to say of most of the senses and impressions that are common to humanity, and which, from an early age, guided itself through life by virtue of the principle of the least action. ' The man who wishes to be happy, he used to say, reduces and restricts himself as far as he is able. He has these two characteristics : *he seldom changes his place, and he takes up little room* '. Such was Fontenelle as revealed by his own confession. Such he was as shown by Mme Geoffrin : ' When he entered a lodging, he left things as he found them ; he would not have added or removed a nail '. He was insensible to the things that interest and amuse others ; beautiful music, fine pictures, he cared for none of them. A new idea in meditation, a piquant touch or an epigram in conversation, alone interested him. When he was conversing, he seemed to be always on the look out for that epigram in others, and as a rule he was the first to utter it ; no man was ever more quoted for his pretty

mots. By a strange appropriateness and harmony, his very maladies, his infirmities, had a certain indolence and calm: 'He had the gout, but without any pain; only his foot became a *bundle of cotton-wool*; he would rest it on an arm-chair, and that was all'. No sting ever entered this soul and this body.

This Portrait of Fontenelle after Mme Geoffrin should be set beside an excellent judgment of Grimm (*Correspondence*, February 1757), which, severe as it may appear, goes to the very truth of the matter in respect of taste. These different estimates are not contradictory, but rather supplement each other and agree. Even the Abbé Trublet, in his turn, Fontenelle's reverend historiographer, supports them with his testimony more than he is aware of. He admits that his hero loved *only once* with a certain tenderness; he is referring to the affection he had for the friend and companion of his childhood, M. Brunel, who was like a second self to him. He was seen to weep real tears when he lost him. This death was the only grief of his long life, the only event that upset his philosophy; on that side he was human for one day. That friendship had contrived, we know not how, to establish itself in his heart from his early childhood. The *counters* of Wisdom failed him on this occasion only.

The Portrait by La Bruyère which we noticed in passing has carried us a long way, and we have to retrace our steps in order to extricate the serious mind and the philosopher from among so many insipidities and frivolous forms. From an early age Fontenelle showed all the deficiencies of a nature destitute of ideal and flame, which had neither a heaven at its horizon, not an inner spark of fire; but he had at the same time all the qualities which are compatible with that sort of purely intellectual nature. A disciple of Descartes in philosophy, but an independent disciple who presumed to judge his master, he understood that he had a part to play, a middle place to take up between the savants and the outside world, and that the mind which, on the one hand, was good at understanding, might, on the other, be good at explaining. He thought it possible to reconcile the disposition which qualified him for receiving exact truths, with the inclination he had for expressing things in an agreeable and palatable manner. He realized and resolved this delicate problem in his

*Entretiens sur la Pluralité des Mondes*, which appeared in 1686 and had the greatest success.

Into this singular work, which in spite of all is still agreeable and useful to read, he introduced the truths of Copernicus wrapped up *à la Scudéry*; but here, in spite of bad taste, truth gains the day. Boileau and La Bruyère might now laugh as much as they pleased at the *précieux* Fontenelle; he was more of a philosopher than they. In these *Conversations*, Fontenelle imagines himself, as you know, to be in a fine park in the country after supper, in company with a fair Marquise. The conversation turns upon the stars; the Marquise desires some astronomical explanations. Fontenelle pretends to wish to speak of something else: 'No, I replied, it shall never be laid at my door that in a wood, at ten o'clock in the evening, I talked philosophy with the most amiable lady I know. Seek your philosophers elsewhere'. However, he would have been very sorry to be taken at his word, for it is precisely in this medley of philosophy, physics and gallantry that he excels. When addressing the fair Marquise he is addressing *the minds of all ignorant people*, and he loves not only to imagine them under this dainty form, but also to indulge in that playful tone which will authorize all his ingenuities. He gains at the same time by introducing all sorts of truths under a frivolous exterior, and avoids any quarrels with the theologians of the time, who had not yet made up their minds on many things. In Fontenelle the new truth is disguised in a gallant compliment, and passes the more surely.

In the very first evening he tries to explain to his Marquise the secret of the wheel-works and the counter-weights of nature, and, to that end, he can think of nothing more apt than to compare the grand spectacle he has before him to the scenery on the stage of the Opera. The philosopher who is investigating causes is like a *mechanic* who is sitting in the pit at the Opera, and trying to find out the explanation of certain *flights*, of certain extraordinary *glory* and *cloud* effects; and, with the help of this simple comparison, Fontenelle finds occasion to bring in the principal philosophic systems which have by turns been put forward by the philosophers. Nothing clearer, nothing more piquant, could be imagined; the reader assists at this series of provisional and illusory explana-

tions, this natural succession of errors, and is made to understand so well how the men of science at first necessarily fell into these errors and exhausted them all, that he is quite ready to give them up. When he comes to astronomy in particular, to the question whether the earth is the centre around which the universe turns, or whether, on the contrary, it describes a revolution in space, he employs some quite moral and palpable comparisons which at once place you at the right point of view: 'You must observe, if you please, that we all naturally resemble a certain Athenian madman, of whom you have heard, who was under the delusion that all the vessels that landed at the Piræus belonged to him. Our madness consists in believing that all nature, without exception, is intended for our use; and when you ask our philosophers what is the use of that prodigious number of fixed stars, a small part of which would suffice to do the work of them all, they will coolly reply that their use is that they rejoice the sight'. Thus, in order not to be like the madman of the Piræus, the reader is already tempted to give up Ptolemy's explanation and adopt that of Copernicus. I can only touch upon this scientific art of insinuation in Fontenelle; he possesses it in the highest degree. In the matter of astronomy and physics, we have but to let him have his way, and, as somebody said very well, he will *coax you to the truth*.

How totally different is the manner in which Pascal embraces the sky and nature! We involuntarily recall that magnificent opening of the *Pensées*: 'Let man then contemplate the whole of Nature in her full and grand majesty, and turn his vision from the low objects which surround him. Let him gaze on that brilliant light, set like an eternal lamp to illumine the universe; let the earth appear to him a point in comparison with the vast circle described by this sun . . .' In place of these full and truly august expressions, Fontenelle, speaking of the heavenly array, is fond of using belittling images and comparisons. Pointing to the essential principle of Nature, who does everything at the least possible cost, and exercises an extraordinary *economy in her great household*, he tells you that that is the only principle which will enable you to *catch the plan on which she does her work*. Pascal felt with trembling, with terror, the majesty and immensity

of Nature, whilst Fontenelle only seems to spy out her skill. The latter has not in him that ideal and heavenly geometry which was primordially conceived by a Pascal, a Dante, a Milton, or even a Buffon ; he has it not, and he has no inkling of it ; he dwarfs the heavens when explaining them. All this is true, and yet there is a point where Fontenelle will soon resume his advantage over even Pascal ; for, in that vision, so admirably conceived and expressed both in its physical and its moral aspect, Pascal at one place corrected his own phrase, retracted and altered it in order to make the sun turn round the earth instead of the earth round the sun. That great mind, touched on this point with a remnant of superstition, recoils before the truth of Copernicus and leaves the question undecided. Inferior as he is to Pascal in respect of imagination and soul, and standing towards him in an incommensurable relation (as we might say in the style of the geometrician), Fontenelle, regarded as a free and emancipated mind, a clear, broad and impartial mind, gradually resumes his advantages, and, towards the end of this century of grandeur, but certainly also of illusion and majestic timidity, he dares to see natural truths as they are in reality, and gives a pleasing expression to them. There lies his originality, his glory.

We begin to perceive wherein, in spite of his airy and mincing charms, in spite of that affected familiarity of expression which at times looks like a studied cavilling against the majesty of things, Fontenelle is profoundly differentiated from those frivolous writers who treat serious subjects and do not regard the truth for its own sake. From this period (1686) he belongs decidedly to the family of strong, positive and serious minds, whatever may be his costume. He is an enemy of ignorance, not an armed enemy, but cool, patient, contemptuous in his mildness, and in his way more uncompromising than he thinks. He is so apt to think that ignorance and stupidity are the most natural and universal facts, that nothing of that nature astonishes or irritates him. However, he is well aware of the kind of progress which is peculiar to the modern world, and he is, in his way, an agent and instrument of it. ' In truth, I believe more and more strongly, he says, that there is a certain genius that has not yet existed outside of our Europe, or which at least has not

gone very far outside of it'. He thinks we owe the discovery and the exercise of this European genius, which is, properly speaking, the genius of method, of accuracy and analysis, and which, according to him, extends to all orders of subjects, especially to Descartes; but it is necessary to apply it better than he did.

Historically, Fontenelle, as M. Flourens remarks, rendered Descartes the same service that Voltaire rendered Newton: he contributed to popularize and secularize him, to make him accessible to society and the drawing-rooms. \* His book of the *Worlds* offers, so to say, two aspects, and converges by a double influence towards two quite different orders of writings. He gave us the first example and the model of those works in which science is adorned, embellished and sophisticated for the use of ladies, of those *hybrid* works, like the compilations on divers subjects of Pougens and Aimé-Martin, those rivals of Demoustier rather than of Fontenelle: that is the frivolous side. But there is also the useful and sensible influence, forming a prelude to that which the greatest minds have not disdained to exercise since. Whilst aiming less at attractiveness, but endeavouring no less to make themselves as clear as possible, Buffon, Cuvier, even Humboldt in his French writings, were not afraid of composing some portions of their writings with a view to the ignorant, and publishing them for the use of all classes of readers. The first example of this lucid and agreeable mode of exposition was given by Fontenelle in his *Mondes* and elsewhere.

If we consider Fontenelle in his other works, written about the age of thirty, at that date when he was both rightly laughed at and unjustly misunderstood by La Bruyère, we shall find that his ideas and opinions are already quite formed. In his *Histoire des Oracles*, so highly appreciated by Bayle (1687), he combats that idea which has been handed down from the Middle Ages, and is still anchored in many minds, that the ancient pagan oracles were delivered by demons. He shows that this supernatural explanation is not necessary, and that before seeking out the cause of a fact, it is important to thoroughly study the fact in itself: 'I am not so convinced of our ignorance, he says, through the things which are, and whose cause is unknown to us, as through

*the things which are not, and the cause of which we discover* '. And he relates the famous story of the golden tooth which was found in the head of a boy in Silesia in 1593. All the savants began to talk and dispute about this golden tooth; it formed the subject of two or three histories. 'All these fine works lacked nothing, says Fontenelle, except the fact that the tooth was really made of gold. When a goldsmith examined the boy, he found that the tooth had been very cleverly covered with gold-leaf; but they began by writing books, and then they consulted a goldsmith'. Fontenelle's work is in every way like that of the goldsmith: he endeavours to strip every object of its enveloping and deceptive layer of illusion.

In his *Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes* (1688), he is right on almost every point, except on the heading of poetry and eloquence, especially of poetry, which, although he thinks he possesses the art of it, he does not feel. Totally destitute of the superior ideal poetic form, and of that richness of the senses which is ordinarily its accompaniment and its organ of expression, he speaks of poetry on every occasion as his friend La Motte might do, that is to say, as a blind man might speak of colours. He cannot conceive the existence in former times, at a certain age of the world, under a certain climate, and in natural and social conditions which will not occur again, of a happy race which expanded into flower, and which we moderns are able to surpass in everything, except in that first delicate development, in that first divine charm. Fontenelle cannot understand Greece. In all things there is a vernal and sacred breath which he does not feel. Outside of that, he possesses the truth, and his glance is in the future: 'Nature, he says, has in her hands a certain dough which is always the same, which she turns over and kneads incessantly into a thousand shapes, and out of which she forms men, animals, plants'. And he concludes that, since she has not broken her mould, there is no reason why it should not produce illustrious moderns as great in their way as the ancients. The literary question was thus reduced, to the great scandal of the scholars, to a question of physics and natural history. Fontenelle comprehends with his intellect all that may be, even though he does not feel it. One is amused to see him pleading against the idolatrous partisans of the ancients



in favour of those powerful modern organizations which are so unlike his own; he pleads for Molière whom he knows, and for Shakespeare whom he does not know. He calmly supposes extraordinary things which might indeed some day come about: We shall some day be ancients ourselves, he remarks, and it is to be hoped that by virtue of the same superstition which we have with respect to the others, *we shall be admired to excess in the ages to come*: 'Heaven knows with what contempt they will treat by comparison with us the *beaux esprits* of that time, who may perhaps be *Americans*'. Thus does Fontenelle, who more than any other is able to get away from himself, and from all those prejudices which depend on times and places, set before himself vistas and changes in the future, and find amusement in regarding them with indifferent eyes. As he is never influenced by others' opinions, he dares to have his own, not only with honesty, but with a kind of audacity and calm impudence. This indifference, so clearly indicated and affected in his tone, seemed to the partisans of antiquity the height of insolence, and the enraged Boileau could not stand it: 'It is a pity, he said one day of La Motte, that he has demeaned himself (*encanailé*) with that little Fontenelle!'

Fontenelle was forty years of age when he was elected Permanent Secretary of the Academy of Sciences (1697); he had published all the works which distinguish him under his first literary form, and he has still sixty years before him under his more chastened, more contained, more serious form; the great mind will henceforth take the lead of the *bel esprit*, or at least will not suffer separation from it. There are times when this second Fontenelle, so impartial, so intelligent, and so impassive, suggests to my mind a Goethe, certainly on a smaller and reduced scale, but of an approximate kind and leading up to the other. A French refugee, Jordan of Berlin, who paid him a visit in 1733, mentions him in terms which exhibit him from this universally respected aspect: 'M. de Fontenelle is magnificently housed; he appears to be very well off, and richly endowed with the blessings of Dame Fortune. Although aged, the glance of his eye is keen and shrewd. We see that this great man has been moulded carefully by Nature . . . .'

M. Flourens has presented this second and last Fonte-

nelle in all lucidity ; he has stripped him not of his peculiarities, but of his petty qualities, and shows him to us standing on the threshold of the sanctuary, invested with the dignity of the Sciences, their accurate interpreter in the eyes of all, without any solemnity, and yet never lowering them except with a dignified and becoming familiarity. He has perfectly defined that series of clever, truthful and concise Eulogies, where every obscurity is cleared up, every technicality generalized, and each savant is lauded only for the important and enduring things that he left : '*He praises, says M. Flourens, by facts which characterize*'.

Fontenelle was the first Permanent Secretary of the Academy of Sciences who wrote in French ; his predecessor Du Hamel still wrote in Latin. Fontenelle was therefore an innovator and an initiator in this elegant and semi-mundane mode of exposition. His work is composed of two parts : the Extracts and analyses of Academic works, and the Eulogies of the Academicians. In the Extracts he endeavours before everything to elucidate and unravel what he expounds : one of his principles was that, in the sciences, even the certainty of results was no excuse for a want of clearness, and that the lay reason is entitled at every instant to intervene and ask for an explanation, as far as it is possible, of what the particular methods conceal from it. In his Eulogies of the Academicians, he contrived to preserve some of the perpetual ingenuity and subtilty of his early manner ; but his love of accuracy introduced into them more and more simplicity. Fontenelle's simplicity, as you may well believe, is of a nature to forbid its resembling that of any other.

It has been remarked that in his first manner there was a sort of contradiction and antithesis between the tone, which was trivial and precise, and the substance of the thought, which tended to the real and the substantial ; there resulted a disproportion and a lack of agreement which made the tissue of his style a continual epigram. In the end this affectation (for it was indeed an affectation), although it was gradually diminished and toned down, became an easy habit, the even and natural pace of his thought. Somebody said of Fontenelle the writer, that he *ambled*, where others ran and spread themselves out with force or gravity. This kind of pace is known to be

particularly agreeable to the women or the delicate. So his manner is entirely composed of soft arguments adapted without any feebleness to the worldly disposition of minds. In the two Prefaces which he wrote for the *Histoire de l'Académie des Sciences* (the History of 1699 and that of 1666), he attained to a real perfection, pleasing and yet almost severe.

Thus did this sound and enlightened reason end by triumphing over its own taste which was originally unsound, and by turning it to the happiest account. This gradual improvement in Fontenelle's manner may have been partly due to Voltaire's influence. Grimm remarked very truly that Voltaire had all the qualities of taste which were the exact opposite of Fontenelle's faults, naturalness, vivacity, quick and unrestrained flashes of wit, gushing from the source. Fontenelle, with La Motte, was about to assume the sceptre under the Regency, and to set the tone in literature, when Voltaire appeared *in the nick of time* to neutralize in the public the effect of this at least doubtful influence, and, young as he was, he insensibly by his example warned the shrewd and subtle Academician that the moment was come for greater simplicity.

Fontenelle, worn out with old age and as witty as ever, died on the 11 January 1757, at the age of a hundred minus one month, merely because he had to die. The century had already fully entered upon the second and more stormy half of its course. But do you not wonder at the existence of such totally opposite minds? I was speaking the other day of Diderot. Fontenelle and Diderot: where could we find a more striking and more direct contrast? Fontenelle, who illustrates better than any definition (as Fontanes has so well said) the dividing line between intellect and genius; and Diderot, a kind of extravasated and ebullient genius, that cannot contain itself within any limit; the one who discreetly opens the century, and holds in his half-closed hand more truths than he allows to escape, who seems to say *Hush!* at every sound and every noise; the other who proclaims and preaches his doctrines with a loud voice, who scatters seed in handfuls to all the winds, apostrophizing the future; Fontenelle who still clings to Descartes and some of the great well-regulated minds of the preceding century, or, which is

worse, to the *précieuses*; and Diderot who, in his paroxysms, by the vehemence and tumultuousness of his word, seems already to appeal to the ardent generations which will be led by Mirabeau and Danton. I leave it to my readers to finish the parallel that each particular would make more piquant. On Fontenelle, my conclusion will be precise; it is that by his long duration, by his longevity, by the multiplicity of his aptitudes and his occupations, with that compound of rare qualities and faults which ended by seasoning his qualities, he has not his equal, that he remains outside of the lines of comparison, below the men of genius, in the class of infinitely distinguished minds, and that in the natural history of literature he shows himself a singular and unique individual of his species.

## CONDORCET<sup>1</sup>

Monday, February 3, 1851.

THIS edition of Condorcet's works for which there was no public demand, but which his family thought it their duty to raise as a monument to his memory, contains some interesting and new parts, notably the Correspondence with Turgot, the Letters of Voltaire, of the great Frederick, of Mlle de Lespinasse. The first volume is readable as a study of French society in the eighteenth century. The entire edition has been executed not only with care, but with luxury. M. Arago has placed at the head of it his Eulogy (or rather his apology) of Condorcet. Like all M. Arago's Eulogies, it contains some strong portions which are treated with the superiority which he shows in matters of science. When he estimates the savant, the geometrician, we bow to his estimate, we accept his judgments without any discussion, and with the respect that is due to his words. But in that which concerns literature, politics and morality, those more open things, upon which, as it seems to me, every cultivated and careful mind may consider itself entitled to have an opinion, his Eulogy appears to me to lend itself to many observations, a few of which I will here make.

Comparing Condorcet's edition of Pascal's *Pensées* with the edition which was published in their time by Pascal's own friends, M. Arago calls the latter *D'Arnaud's edition*. I thought at first that this was merely a printer's error; but seeing this name *D'Arnaud* repeated on two occasions, and reappearing in the same form in the different editions of the Eulogy, I was forced to acknowledge, to my great surprise, that the man who was called in the seventeenth century *the great Arnauld*, was much less well

<sup>1</sup> *Works of Condorcet*, new edition, with the *Eulogy of Condorcet*, by M. Arago, 12 vols. 1847-1849.

known in the nineteenth in the full Academy of Sciences, and that in that assembly his name was being imperceptibly and quite unconsciously confounded with that of D'Arnaud (Baculard). What would M. Arago say of a writer who, having to speak of the geometrician *Fontaine*, should persistently though inadvertently call him *La Fontaine* ?

In another place, taking La Harpe to task, M. Arago thinks he is justifying Condorcet against him, and he triumphs. Here is the fact. Condorcet was not religious, which may appear a misfortune, but which is allowable. What is less allowable, is that he was a fanatic of irreligion, and afflicted with a sort of hydrophobia on that point. Finding in Vauvenargues' *Works* two pieces, a *Prayer* and a religious *Meditation*, Condorcet, who was embarrassed by these pieces, declares unhesitatingly that they were *found among the author's papers*, after his death ; that they were only written, by the way, as the result of a kind of wager ; but that the editors thought it right to add them to Vauvenargues' *Pensées*, as a passport to the bold thoughts which accompany them. Now, all this is inaccurate and contrary to the truth, since Vauvenargues himself had these two pieces inserted in the first edition, prepared under his directions and published during his life. This was no occasion therefore to triumph over La Harpe, or to raise Condorcet upon the shield.

These various inaccuracies of detail raised doubts in my mind with regard to the work as a whole, and, after having myself taken up the study of Condorcet's life in so far as it is accessible to me and to all the world, I have arrived at a quite different estimate of the man and his character ; and, as Condorcet was a most important political personage, one of those men who make revolutions, who urge them forward, who expect everything from them, who only stop at the last moment, on the very brink of the precipice, and fall into it, I thought it might be useful to state candidly and boldly my own point of view.

Condorcet, born on the 17 September 1743, in Picardy, of a noble family, the members of which were advantageously placed in the army and the Church, felt an early and irresistible calling to devote himself to the sciences and to letters. Educated at first by the Jesuits at Reims, then at the Collège de Navarre in Paris, he distinguished him-

self there in all branches of knowledge, and especially gave precocious evidence of that mathematical power which, in those who possess it, never waits for the number of years. Fontaine, the same whom we mentioned a moment ago, a great geometrician, but not a very good man, had remarked Condorcet's first analytical works, and may have been afraid of seeing a rival in him. 'I thought for a moment that he was better than I, he said, and I was jealous of him; but he has since reassured me'. It is Condorcet himself who pleasantly tells this anecdote in his Eulogy of Fontaine, and this time with good taste.

What must especially have reassured Fontaine and the men of the profession, was Condorcet's comprehensive curiosity, which carried him outside of his particular sphere into every branch and every direction of human knowledge, so that by spreading itself out and embracing everything, it allowed his mind hardly any time to exercise its inventive powers upon any subject. Hence, whatever may have been the value of his first works in mathematical analysis, Condorcet very soon came to be no more than the most faithful secretary, the most elevated and most enlightened interpreter of the works of others. His friends of that time, that so regrettable period of his youth, the moment when he made such a brilliant début in the world (1770), have described him in this first interesting and expansive form, multiplying himself at pleasure, willingly dividing himself up among all. 'M. de Condorcet is at his mother's, wrote Mlle de Lespinasse to M. de Guibert; he works ten hours a day. He has twenty correspondents, ten intimate friends; and each of them might without any conceit think himself the first in his affections: never, never has anybody had so much existence, so many resources and so much felicity'. We see that there is a little irony mixed into this well-meant sketch. Mlle de Lespinasse, who always speaks of him as *le bon Condorcet*, was very well aware of this characteristic fault in him, which consisted in doubling, in centupling himself, in spreading himself out too much.

She painted him besides in an official *Portrait*, intended to be shown. When one has just read, as I have done, the writings of the revolutionary Condorcet, not the writings which are collected in this family edition, the only works of

which M. Arago seems to have any knowledge, but the pamphlets of the moment, those in which he dealt right and left *his little poisoned dagger thrusts* (as André Chénier called them); when one has just perused the series of articles which he published in the *Chronique de Paris*, for example, from the 15 November 1791, until the famous 10 August 1792, and later, one has a feeling of sadness and almost of pity. What! this man of whom Mlle de Lespinasse said: 'M. de Condorcet's face proclaims the most distinctive and the most absolute quality of his soul, which is goodness'; the man of whom Grimm said again: 'It is a very good mind, full of reason and philosophy; on his face dwell calm and peace; goodness shines from his eyes: he would be more wrong than another not to be an honest man, because he would deceive more by his physiognomy, which proclaims the mildest and the most peaceable qualities . . .'; what! is this the same man who, after 1791, deserting his first party and carried away by his systems, which are superior on this occasion to his affections, ranged himself among the followers of Brissot, and, having become one of the leaders of the press, worked it with an often perfidious ability; who for the triumph of his cause trod under foot all vain scruples, who could connive at excesses as long as he thought them useful, who rejected no auxiliary, who one day took up the defence of Chabot in the full Legislative Assembly, and, recounting for the edification of his readers the insurrection of June 20, celebrating the *red cap of liberty* with which they adorned the head of Louis XVI, wrote (*Chronique de Paris*, 22 June 1792): 'This crown is as good as another, and *would not have been disdained by Marcus Aurelius*!' When we see, merely from the moral point of view, such transformations, we curse revolutions, we dread them, not for our lives, but for their influence upon our own character; we ask ourselves whether there is not in us some singularity, some wrong view or malignant passion, some hidden fanaticism, which they might have the power of afterwards developing and bringing to light for our degradation and our shame.

I am not by any means animated by any hostile feeling towards Condorcet; his death no doubt redeemed and expiated some of his wrongs, and, I esteem, in many respects, his vast intellectual capacity; but he offers so



great and so proud an example that we are bound to probe it to its depths and to extract from it a part of the lessons it contains—humiliating lessons, which only an error equal to his own could to-day think of turning into a triumph for human reason.

In the first Condorcet, however, a distinctive feature was already peeping from underneath that apparent bonhomie and even through that real goodness. 'He has the surest and most delicate tact for seizing upon absurdities and for distinguishing all the shades of vanity; he has even a sort of *malignity* in painting them', said Mlle de Lespinasse. Grimm likewise touches upon 'that *bitterness of pleasantry* which, mingled with the appearances of an unchangeable mildness and bonhomie, drew upon him, even in the society of his best friends, the name of *the furious sheep*'. It was d'Alembert, his intimate friend, who gave him this surname, on seeing his inordinate anger against M. Necker. Condorcet loved and admired Turgot, nothing more; but he abhorred and detested M. Necker, so much so that he wrote to Voltaire (25 October 1776): 'You know, my illustrious master, what has just happened to us. Necker is succeeding M. Turgot: *it is the Abbé Dubois taking the place of Fénelon*'. M. Necker compared to Cardinal Dubois! Only Condorcet could have thought of it. And observe that this ill-feeling for M. Necker was not the result of any personal wrong; he detested him solely because he knew that he was opposed to some of his own ideas in political economy. It was this same *rational* hatred which made Condorcet at the same time insult Colbert, whose Eulogy M. Necker had written. 'As it is only a step from admiration to imitation, he says, I recall with trembling that Colbert began his ministry with a *bankruptcy* and ended it with a *forgery*'. Voltaire's good sense, however, revolted against such a piece of injustice, and he recalls Condorcet to order: 'I have never agreed with those who slander *Jean-Baptiste (Colbert)* . . .' But we already get a glimpse of a corner of wrong judgment in Condorcet, for only a mind that is partially warped by passion and by system is capable of comparing M. Necker both to Cardinal Dubois and to Colbert, and to make this double comparison an equal insult. Somebody has pointed out with great approval some evidence of truthfulness and candour in this corre-

spondence between Condorcet and Voltaire, but he should also have remarked those first indications of a disparaging spirit, and especially the kind of adroitness with which Condorcet, who is greatly displeased with Voltaire for having written some verses for Mme Necker, tries to stir up his illustrious master against the Genevan financier. ' Besides, he writes to him, I can only despair of a man (M. Necker) who believes that the tragedies of Shakespeare are masterpieces . . . ' It was not so very stupid to provoke Voltaire's anger from that side, knowing that he was more irritable in the matter of tragedies than in the matter of political economy.

A close examination of Condorcet's letters to Voltaire and Turgot would reveal more and more clearly this malignant vein: his opinions on Buffon, of the Maréchal du Muy (to take some names of very opposite nature), and of many others, are impregnated with acrimony and disclose a great depth of injustice and prejudice. We occasionally find some wit in these letters, but the tone of them is generally ordinary, and even coarse in their pleasantry. All who are not of the same opinion or on the same side as the writer are quickly and plainly called *canaille*. In a word, in the midst of these lavish expressions of friendliness and sensibility, and of these intellectual lights of Condorcet, one distinctly discovers a grain of fanaticism which is ready to spring up.

We all have some vanity, remarked Mlle de Lescrinasse, but ' I do not know, she added, where M. de Condorcet's has hidden itself: I have never been able to discover in him either the germ or the movement of vanity '. This vanity (as the sequel has shown) had entirely concentrated itself in one point with Condorcet, in the absolute confidence he had in the excellence of his ideas and his system relatively to the perfectability of humanity. He believed that he held the key to the happiness of the human race and of all future races; he was fond of distributing and lending this key to all; but when a man has such confidence in the correctness of a single one of his own views, which embraces the future of the world, he may be very easy and unpretentious with regard to everything else: under its air of benevolence vanity has a sufficiently fine and lofty place to dwell in.

Condorcet derived his system from Turgot, and was

by no means the originator of it; he only developed it, extended it, and endeavoured more and more to realize and propagate it. In order to study Condorcet thoroughly and on the most pacific and least contentious ground, one should read his *Life of M. Turgot*. When he expounds the vast system of views and ideas of that friend and master, his senior by fifteen years, for whom he had a real cult, he generally expounds his own thoughts; but here, where they are nearer to their source, they have preserved more of their original clearness and lucidity. Turgot believes in a supreme intelligence that regulates the world; he believes in a continuation of existence beyond this life; he believes in a stronger morality, a morality more founded on principle, than Condorcet. Turgot, besides, has some imagery and colour in his style. Turgot is a more ideal and more original Condorcet, a still moral and innocent Condorcet. Later, when he takes up and expounds a similar system on his own account, Condorcet cuts out every divine idea, all hope in an ulterior life, and his style loses all its lucidity. He forces Turgot's views whilst thinking to state them more precisely and extend them; he puts into them a great deal of grey and a leaden tint.

The idea of Turgot and Condorcet, which by the way, in its most general terms, is not peculiar to them, is as follows: Humanity, considered as a whole and from its beginnings, may be compared to a man who has successively passed through a state of childhood, then through a state of youth and of manhood. At present it has reached its maturity. And there is no reason why this maturity should not be maintained with vigour, inheriting the accumulated results of the preceding ages, and continually adding to them new acquisitions. Bacon, Pascal himself, Fontenelle, Lessing, all those great minds have held the same view. The originality peculiar to Turgot, and also to Condorcet, lies in the nature and the measure of extreme and indefinite progress of which they believe this maturity of the human race to be susceptible. If they did no more than indicate the general characters of modern society, the predominance of knowledge and industry over war, a certain equality of culture and well-being for the greater number, an equality which should henceforth be the chief aim of institutions; if in short they

did no more than recommend humanity, which henceforth is a mature person, to adopt in all things the spirit of its age, there would not be much need to contradict them, and we should unreservedly praise them for having been forerunners in seeking and pointing out the ways and means. But what strikes me especially in Condorcet, and what constitutes his greatest originality, is his abuse of and blind faith in methods, the idea, so contrary to observation, that all errors are the results of institutions and laws, that no person is born with a perverted mind, that to directly offer men the lights of knowledge suffices to make them instantly good, sensible, reasonable, and that nothing is more common, more easy to procure for all, than mental balance, from which would necessarily flow uprightness of conduct. We cannot understand such credulity in a man who was so clever to seize the absurdities and faults of the people he had before his eyes; or rather we can explain it very well by the spirit of system which is able to reconcile contradictions of this kind. The man of system disparages, he despises men individually, and suddenly he begins to exalt humanity in the mass and to hope the best of it. The last chapter of the *Sketch of the Progress of the Human Mind*, by Condorcet, is the most striking example, in an enlightened man, of the delusions and chimeras that are possible in this dry and dull kind of reasoning. The author suppresses in idea everything that appertains to the particular character and genius of the different races, the different nations; he aims at levelling down to a universal mediocrity the superior powers and what are called the gifts of nature; he looks forward to the future day when there will be no more occasion for great virtues, for acts of heroism, when all that sort of thing will have become superfluous by reason of the gradual raising of the common level. Never was seen a more pitifully placed ideal.

That is the last, the dreariest, dream of pure reason infatuated with itself; it is the encyclopedic ideal in all its opaque beauty. Condorcet offers the last expression of it. In one place his hope in progress goes so far as to conjecture that a time may come when diseases will cease to exist, and 'when death will be merely the effect either of extraordinary accidents, or of the ever more gradual destruction of the vital powers. No doubt, he adds naively,

man will not become immortal; but is it not possible that the distance between the moment when he begins to live, and the common period when, naturally, without any illness, without any accident, he feels the difficulty of being, will continually increase? And all that as the result of the progress of medicine? O Molière, where art thou?

In his dream of an earthly Elysium Condorcet forgets one kind of death which might become frequent if the thing were ever realized, that is death from ennui.

After reading this colourless and would-be comforting book, in which we meet with not a single expression, not a single thought, to cheer the mind and rejoice the eye, one should quickly open the *Memoirs* of the Cardinal de Retz and *Gil Blas*: those two books are the best antidote to Condorcet.

Once again, it is not the idea itself that we have reached an age of maturity, an epoch of equality and even of levelling, and that we should make the best of modern society in that sense, it is not this idea that constitutes Condorcet's perverted view; his particular error lies in his belief that we have but to will and henceforth everything is for the best, that by altering institutions we shall change the motive springs of the human heart, that every citizen will insensibly become a reasonable and rational philosopher, and that we shall no longer need, in intellectual labours for example, to be incited by the hope of reward or the love of fame. To repair the heart of man and make it new, such is the exorbitant pretension of this final school of the eighteenth century, issued from the *Encyclopædia*, of which Condorcet, as I have said, is the extreme product and as it were the monstrous brain. Never was seen an apparently more enlightened and methodical madness, a more reasoning madness. 'But these men may do what they please, somebody said very gaily, they always forget the existence of the seven capital sins, and that it is they, under one name or another, that guide the world and keep it going'.

It was the eve of the 20 June (1792), and of that hideous insurrection which the Girondists incited and abetted, in order to regain the power. The movement was ushered in by petitions. Several of the sections of Paris appeared at the bar of the Legislative Assembly. Let us hear

Condorcet's report of these precursory movements, in the *Chronique de Paris* of the 18 June:

'Several Sections of Paris presented themselves at the bar; their petitions all had the same object in view, that of removing the dangers which threaten the public weal . . . They are the same men who in '89, and at about this period, were deliberating with as much tranquillity as firmness on the means of repressing the insolence of tyranny . . . But, familiarized with political principles by three years of revolution, they are not carried away merely by the feeling produced by events. They trace back the causes through the effects . . . From the manner in which the people explain the events which certain persons would still like to make out to be inexplicable phenomena, we should be almost tempted to believe that they devote a few hours of every day to the study of analysis'.

Here we catch the practical consequences of these false speculative theories in the act of formation. Here Condorcet prints without a smile, on June 18, that the men who will take part in the insurrection two days later, and soon after in that of August 10, appear to have become so reasonable that they look as if they devoted themselves every morning in their studies to a little analytical and ideological operation. The sophist Garat, who read over his Condillac on his way to the Convention, could not have imagined anything better.

Condorcet, as I have observed from the testimony of all his friends, had a fund of natural goodness; he had sensibility, and even a quite physical sensibility. He professed to have observed in his early youth 'that the interest we have in being just and virtuous was founded on the pain that a sensitive being necessarily feels at the idea of the evil suffered by another sensitive being'. Starting from this principle and in order the better to preserve this natural feeling in all its energy and delicacy: 'I have given up the chase, he said, for which I had a liking, and have not suffered myself to kill even an insect, unless it is a very harmful one'. Turgot, with whom he enters into this sort of confidence, replies admirably on the chapter of morality, and indicates the points on which he differs from him. It is evident that Turgot is much more ready than Condorcet to admit an intimate and direct moral feeling, and that is in fact the point where Condorcet sinned. Turgot does not confine himself, in the

matter of morality, to a purely mobile impression of physical sensibility, he has more fixed principles. 'In the matter of morality, he says charmingly, I am a great enemy of indifference and a great friend of indulgence, of which I often have as much need as any other'. Condorcet, in his craving for activity and eternal propagation, appears to believe that it is not possible to avoid certain harmless vices without risking the loss of greater virtues. 'Scrupulous people, he thinks, are not equal to doing great things'. Turgot here stops him short; he seems to divine the party man and the propagandist who is already peeping through in Condorcet, and says to him: 'Morality turns around duties still more than around active virtues

. . . All duties are in harmony with each other. *No virtue, in whatever sense we may take this word, can dispense with justice*'. And he declares that he has not too good an idea 'of those people who do *great things* at the expense of justice'. The point on which Condorcet joins issue with Turgot here becomes very clear and palpable: we can put our finger upon the link where the resemblance and similarity of the two souls is broken. We may assert that in '93 Turgot would have died on the scaffold like M. de Malesherbes; he would have died in doing justice to that feeble king, a deceived but honest man, who had said in 1776, on hearing the news of the Remonstrances which the Parliament was preparing in favour of statute-labour: 'I very well see that M. Turgot and myself are the only ones who love the people'.—'*Those words are very true*', wrote Condorcet to Voltaire at this date, when reporting the saying of Louis XVI.

The most intimate friend of Turgot, that minister of whom Condorcet himself is made to say in a rhymed epistle of Voltaire:

Quand un Sully renaît, espère un Henri-Quatre,

Condorcet, proceeding from one argument to another, from one sophism to another, and through not being warned by that direct moral sense that utters an energetic *No* at the first suggestion of evil and injustice, came to record, in the Trial of Louis XVI, that unique vote, that hypocritical vote which remains forever associated with his name, and by which he tried to reconcile what he called his philanthropic principles and his pretended sensibility with the

excessive harshness of the conclusion : ' I vote for the most serious penalty in the Penal Code, short of death '. In this reserve there was another sophism.

We begin to see very well in what way Condorcet, in spite of his merits, was a great mind gone wrong, and that he was not always an upright heart. His career is divided into two distinct parts. Having attained celebrity at the early age of thirty, Permanent Secretary of the Academy of Sciences, soon a member of the French Academy, honoured throughout Europe, truly no man of letters, no savant, ever had less occasion than he to complain of the old society, of which he was, before '89, one of the most serious ornaments. His Academic Eulogies, although they hardly ever show any colour, any sensibility, any charm or any felicitous expressions, and though they are often spoiled by declamation, may be commended on account of their faithful analyses, their elevated and firm judgments, their shrewd and sometimes mordant observations. ' One could not read, says M. Biot, anything more interesting, more worthy, more noble, than his Eulogies of Linné, of Euler and Haller '. Philosophy at that time enjoyed such extreme favour that Condorcet was readily pardoned several little anonymous and satiric pamphlets, which he pleased himself sometimes in publishing under various disguises. Until '89 Condorcet had therefore done nothing that might positively belie that title of *a man of antique chivalry and antique virtue* which Voltaire one day bestowed upon him, whilst daring at the same time to place him above Pascal. Voltaire again said to him, whilst predicting the fairest future for philosophy : ' Let be, it is impossible to prevent thought ; and the more one thinks, the more unhappy will men be. *You will see some fine days, you will bring them about ; this idea cheers the end of mine* '. Such was Condorcet, happy, flourishing, illustrious, generally loved and honoured in society, before '89.

The Revolution did not at first carry him to the Constituant Assembly, and he remained in the second plane, contenting himself with writing and publishing his ideas on all subjects that were in the order of the day. He was still in his groove, and, in these times of exaltation, a large share must be allotted to essays and audacities of every kind. His entirely wrong and fatal deviation dates from



1791. M. Arago has noted it; but when he represents Condorcet as a member of the second legislature, that Legislative Assembly in which personal dissensions were every day growing more virulent, and *always refusing to take part in all these combats*, he is completely in error. Openly or secretly, Condorcet, on the contrary, never ceased to be mixed up with these battles, and neglected no opportunity of inflaming them. As a member of the Assembly and at the same time as a reporter of the sittings, first for the *Journal de Paris* and afterwards for the *Chronique de Paris*, he criticizes and rallies his colleagues in those papers, and sometimes denounces them: 'Following up the resignation of MM. Daveyroux, La Faye, etc. (he writes on the 2 August 1792), I must add that of M. Jaucourt . . . They say too that the good M. Ramond has been absent for some time. Thus on the eve of a battle we see the cowards, the traitors or the half-traitors taking to their heels, and those who remain are all the stronger for their absence'. By an impropriety of which he does not appear to have been sensible, he did not discontinue, at the very time that he was President of the Assembly (February 1792), reporting the sittings and analysing, as a journalist, the debates which he was supposed to be directing as President. His style of writing, however, was at this time still moderate in its terms, or was hostile only by insinuation. In the issue of the 5 July 1792, we may read a letter from M. Pastoret to Condorcet, a most violent letter, which proves at least that the summaries of the debates in the Assembly which the latter published were not calculated to promote harmony. The general spirit of his reports, as he avowed, was entirely pointed against the Executive Power, which was being undermined on all sides: 'to disclose the conduct of the agents of the Executive Power . . ., to defend the Legislative Power against a cloud of *watchers*, paid to alienate from it the confidence of the people . . .' these were the first points of his programme. Whenever the people *in person* enter into communication with the Assembly, Condorcet applauds. 'You know, he wrote on the 21 November 1791, that the Sunday sittings are devoted to the sacred and indispensable duty of hearing petitioners . . . The Assembly must love to feel itself sometimes electrified by the expressions that the enthusiasm of a

free and generous people brings into the very midst of its sittings. It is as useful as it is just that the citizens should not lose the habit of evincing, in presence of the Assembly, the joyful or uneasy impressions they receive from its laws; and the people may say that they have lost their liberty when they no longer enjoy this advantage'. He favours them to the best of his power, he excuses the applause or the murmurs from the galleries. He is astonished that some of his fellow members should express uneasiness at this tendency of the galleries to dominate the Assembly. 'This police supervision over the hands of that part of the public which assists at the sittings is to some people an affair of the greatest importance, he says (31 January 1792); one would think that their constituents had sent them to Paris for no other purpose'. When shouts are raised on the terrace of the Tuileries to intimidate or stimulate the legislators, Condorcet complains very mildly (10 January 1792). This terrace, which may facilitate the popular insurrection and the invasion of the Tuileries, is very dear to him, and he applauds the decree of the Assembly which permits this entrance to be kept open for the people (29 July 1792). When some of his colleagues, whom he calls the *sentry frequenters of the Tuileries*, complain of having been insulted by the people on entering the house, he thinks their objections *ridiculous*. The first time that he sees the red cap make its appearance, he jests at the fears that it excites, and that very pleasantly (16 March 1792). It would be impossible for a physicist to observe more closely than he does every premonitory flash of lightning, and to be less afraid of the storm.

His opposition, moreover, is crafty and is only unmasked by degrees. He begins by denying that there is such a thing in the Assembly as a republican party, a party hostile to the Constitution, hostile to order and peace (3 December 1791). 'Nothing, he says, has proved it hitherto. It is true that a few patriots think it is important to allow the public mind to *develop all its energy* . . . ; that it is not yet time to doubt the *power of reason*'. When he attacks the Ministers he is particularly careful to except and spare some of them, notably M. de Narbonne. The Girondists relied upon his help in grasping the power. Condorcet had to justify himself later for his Eulogies of

M. de Narbonne, and it was alleged as an excuse that he had signed but not written them (6 September 1792). During the Ministry of the Girondists, Condorcet is in perfect agreement with them, and only after their retirement from the Ministry does he visibly urge on the insurrection which is to bring them back to power. I have already mentioned his references to the insurrectional procession of the 20 June and the red cap which was placed on the head of Louis XVI, which he presumed to compare with a *crown fit for Marcus Aurelius*. Condorcet's account of that memorable day is odious and truly derisive :

'The expectation of these sage magistrates (the mayor and the municipal officers), he says, has not been disappointed. This day, which the plotters had hoped to make a bloody one, has been *peaceful*. At ten o'clock in the evening *nothing distinguished it from an ordinary day*. No act of disorder was committed in the castle, for the forcing of one or two doors, the breaking of a few windows, cannot be taken into account, when twenty or thirty thousand men penetrate at once into a habitation of which they do not know the outlets'.

In the interval between the 20 June and the 10 August, Condorcet never ceases, by his articles, to inflame or at least to flatter the already exalted public opinion, and to openly evince his desire to see it go to extremes. Chabot was accused of having gone, in the night of June 19 to 20, to the Faubourg Saint-Antoine to stir up the people : 'M. Condorcet begs to be allowed to speak in order to observe that a working-woman of that Faubourg, whom he saw on the Wednesday morning, told him that M. Chabot had been there and had exhorted the citizens not to assemble in arms' (*Chronique de Paris*, 26 June 1792). Behold Chabot justified by Condorcet ! We know how this same Chabot, a witness for the prosecution and an informer against Condorcet in the trial of the Girondists, paid him back.

And the September massacres, do you know how Condorcet presents and introduces them ? 'We draw the curtain, he writes, over the events of which it would be too difficult, at this moment, to estimate the number and calculate the consequences. Unhappy and terrible is the situation when the character of a people naturally

good and generous is *constrained* to have recourse to such a vengeance !' (4 September 1792).<sup>1</sup>

Enough of these shameful weaknesses and these miserable tactics ! We ask ourselves what the honest and generous soul of Turgot would have felt at such a spectacle, at the sight of his degenerate friend. Malesherbes was highly indignant, and in his honest anger he gave utterance to words of execration against Condorcet which were remembered. Noble old man, those words were not worthy of a mouth like yours ; but the true culprit is the man who was able to force them from you !

André Chénier, a witness of the same deeds, and judging Condorcet in the fray as a deserter from his cause, from the cause of honest people, exclaimed :

' C —, a man born for fame and the good of his country, if he had been able to respect his former writings and to blush before his own conscience ; a man whose name it would be absurd to write down among that mass of infamous names, if the vices of his base heart had not dragged him down to the level or even below the level of those wretches, since his talents and his immense studies had made him capable of running a better race ; since he had no need, like them, of seeking the celebrity of Herostatus, and could have attained to honours and fortune at any time when it could be done without renouncing either justice, humanity, or shame '.

It would be interesting on the other side to see Mme Roland receiving Condorcet, at his entry into the party, with distrust in spite of his merits, and esteeming him indifferently respectable, and Robespierre afterwards thundering against him with severity from the height of his savage puritanism (speech of the 7 May 1794). From M. de Malesherbes down to Robespierre, we might thus have exhausted the circle of the most disparate judgments, and all would agree on the same point of condemnation with respect to the person : something suspicious in his conduct, and something unclear in his character.

It was Condorcet's great sophism and his misfortune

<sup>1</sup> A few persons (and there are still a few left), who love Condorcet better than the truth, have tried to insinuate that, in these quotations, I may have wrongly attributed to Condorcet articles that he never wrote. Let those persons take the trouble to open the *Chronique de Paris* at the indicated dates, and they will there see all those articles signed with his name in full. It is possible that they will still be unconvinced ; they are at liberty to believe that Condorcet wrote and signed what he did not think. Let us leave these devotees and idolaters with their god.

never to have felt in himself the cry of the immediate moral sense, and to have too long held himself exonerated from all his party manœuvres in view of the greatest future happiness of the human race. This man was so perfectly sure of the result of his ideas and of the blessings that the whole of humanity would derive from it, that he thought he might well buy it at the price of a few momentary concessions. But what concessions! Mme de Staël pointed to him as realizing in the highest degree the character of *party spirit*, and she was right.

Condorcet had, I admit, the passion and the *religion of the happiness of mankind*; that was not enough. It behoved him not to imitate those high priests who so greatly excited his anger, and not to devote himself to making his religion prevail at the expense of justice.

After the revolution of the 10 August and when he had won his case against royalty, we see Condorcet slackening his activity and trying in his turn to moderate that of others. The *Chronique de Paris* shows him, in the last months of 1792, raising his voice with a certain firmness against anarchical ideas, against 'those immoral ideas, destructive of all social order, which they are secretly labouring to accredit among the people' (September 18). He finds forcible words to stigmatize Marat; he appeals for union and harmony in the bosom of the nascent Convention. He believes, in a word, that what was permitted before the 10 August, is no longer permitted after. That is the everlasting story. But the passions of the masses, once aroused, do not thus obey the pass-word of the philosophers. They could hardly be charmed for a moment by the voice of that Siren which is called genius.

We must not look to Condorcet for any real talent, in the literary sense of the word, in any of the writings which issued from his pen during the Revolution. As a speaker, his language was as abstract, as colourless and monotonous as his delivery; as a journalist, he never chances upon a brilliant touch, a living image or a spark of fire; precision and a certain cold irony are the only qualities of the kind we are able to find in him. When he is animated by sincere patriotic feeling, his heat never comes to a glow. To find his true literary talent we must go back to his Academic Eulogies; after them his style became ever more and more grey.

'It is true that Condorcet never says anything but common things, M. Joubert remarked shrewdly, but he appears to say them only after well thinking them over'. It is this stamp of the *reflective in the common* (speaking literally) that distinguishes him. That is indeed the impression he produces upon every reader of a quick and delicate taste.

As to the substance of things, however, it would be unjust to disregard, in Condorcet's public labours, at this epoch, numerous evidences of his great intellectual capacity. His greatest faculty was for combining, connecting and organizing. Upon the whole and upon every branch, every point of the scientific order and the social mechanism, he had some fixed, thought-out, sometimes ingenious ideas; and, in that universal casting of society and the human mind which was being essayed, he was able to render some true services to public instruction. In my youth I often had occasion to appreciate and to study this quality of Condorcet in the person of M. Daunou, who was a sort of reduced and diminished Condorcet, a second-hand but pure and irreprehensible Condorcet, and a more ornate writer. Leaving aside anything that might be open to question in his conduct, M. Daunou never spoke of Condorcet except as the type of the enlightened man (style of the eighteenth century).

Proscribed with the Girondists, Condorcet died at Bourg-la-Reine, in the night of the 7 to the 8 April 1794; when he was arrested he took poison. This unhappy end and the touching circumstances which accompanied it, the long mourning, the merit and beauty of his noble widow, that mutual pity and indulgence of which everybody had need after so many errors and excesses, have perhaps covered over the wrongs of his last years and gradually carried back his name to the rank from which he should never have allowed it to fall. But it must be remembered that this is after all an amnesty, and we must not try to make it an apotheosis.

Condorcet will remain, whatever one may say, the most manifest example of the baneful result that may be engendered by a grain of perverted intellect and of the spirit of system obstinately lodged in the midst of vast knowledge and of what we call lights, by a germ of fanaticism and malignity developed in the heart of an originally

kindly nature, by an indiscreet and exaggerated application of mathematical methods carried into the social and moral sciences, by the abuse of analysis and by a credulity, an abstract superstition, of quite a new kind among those very men who proclaim themselves the most emancipated from every kind of illusion and every kind of belief. These orgies of rationalism are followed by reactions in a contrary direction, and Condorcet gives the game, on the morrow, into the hands of the Bonalds and the de Maistres.

## BUSSY-RABUTIN

*Monday, February 10, 1851.*

IN his abundant and excellent *Mémoires sur Madame de Sévigné*, M. Walckenaer has brought Bussy-Rabutin upon the tapis so often, that we know him as well as we might know one of our own contemporaries, that we live with him, that we are in the secret of his amours, of his vanities, of his weaknesses; and as Bussy, nobleman and grand seigneur as he prided himself on being before anything else, is a good writer, and among those who have helped in their time to polish the language, and as La Bruyère placed him on that account beside Bouhours, it is as a writer we will speak of him to-day.

Roger de Rabutin, Comte de Bussy, born at Épiry near Autun, in April 1618, possessed in a high degree that mocking and mordant vein, that exuberance of wit for which his province gains the credit, and of which we find many a direct testimony in the Pirons, the La Monnoyes, and the Du Deffands. It has been said that he should have been born a Gascon rather than a Burgundian; I do not think so. Bussy belongs to that generation of the Saint-Evremonds, the La Rochefoucaulds, the Retz', all three his seniors by a few years only, a generation that was already in evidence and matured before Louis XIV's majority. He was precocious, and, though he commenced the profession of arms at thirteen years of age, as he says, or at least at fifteen (for the dates he gives offer some difficulties), he had already had a good education, at first with the Jesuits at Autun, and then at the Collège de Clermont in Paris. He read Ovid early, and loved poetry. The poet Racan was a friend of his father and had written one of his finest Odes for him, in which he exhorted him to retirement:



Bussy, notre printemps s'en va presque expiré ;  
 Il est temps de jouir du repos assuré  
 Où l'âge nous convie :  
 Fuyons donc ces grandeurs qu'insensés nous suivons,  
 Et, sans penser plus loin, jouissons de la vie  
 Tandis que nous l'avons.

In the abridged version of his *Memoirs* which he wrote for his children under the title of *Usage des Adversités*, our Bussy quoted this poem of Racan, but with some notable alterations. The poet only gave his friend the counsels of an idler and a sage, and Bussy substitutes Christian counsels; where Racan said :

Qu'Amour soit désormais la fin de nos désirs ;  
 Car pour eux seulement les Dieux ont fait la gloire,  
 Et pour nous les plaisirs ;

Bussy, in his corrected and quite edifying version, proposes to read :

Que Dieu soit désormais l'objet de nos désirs ;  
 Il forma les mortels pour jouir de sa gloire,  
 Et non pas des plaisirs.

Be that as it may, when Bussy, in his younger years, read that Ode which in his eyes formed a part of the inheritance and the glory of his house, he read it indeed in the original version, and his dearest object was, to the best of his power, to combine the two things which the poet separated; pleasures and glory, enterprises of war and those of love.

He has portrayed himself with sincerity in his *Memoirs*, and, in general, if we may reproach him with vanity, we cannot reproach him with lacking a certain candour and even an ingenuousness of confessions which cannot force itself to dissimulation. When he speaks of himself, he already belongs to those who write their confessions, but who confess themselves, not in all humility, but in all pride. At the very beginning of his career he indulged in all the vices and all the caprices of his day : he was a duellist, a gambler, a rake, experienced in every kind of depravity : at the same time with an intellectual bent which smacked of the man of culture even in the soldier, and which saved his actions from brutality.

'Roger de Rabutin, he says of himself, had large

and soft eyes, a well cut mouth, a large nose inclining to the aquiline, a high forehead, an open countenance and a happy expression, fair hair, fine and thin (*all these are signs of a refined and lofty race*). In his intellect there was delicacy and power, a gay and sprightly humour. He spoke well; he wrote correctly and pleasingly. He was born *kind . . .* Here we must stop him, and we say with all those who knew him: He was born caustic, slanderous to a degree, and unable to keep back the smart things that rose to his lips and that he generally took care to perpetuate in his writings. He first indulged in sarcasms, as a man of wit, and he loved to record them as a man of letters.<sup>1</sup>

His love adventures are told in his *Memoirs* with liveliness and extreme naturalness. We may read of his first intrigue with the young widow of quality whom he meets at Guise, his other intrigue with the fair countess he sees at Moulins, and the fantastic and rather grotesque scenes in the dilapidated château that he describes with complacency and with a real literary talent. In passing he makes some very good and very just remarks on the heart and the passions. Light-hearted as he is, Bussy did indeed know a true passion, but it was late in life; he admits that, in all those early and mad adventures, his heart was not seriously engaged. 'To return to my amours, he says amusingly in one place, it must be observed that I could not bear my mistress, she was so fond of me'.—'My time to love strongly and long was not yet come', he says again; and speaking of a separation which took place at that time, and which was less painful to him than it should have been, he adds: 'The fact is that youth at its height is incapable of reflections; it is quick, fiery, passionate *without being tender*; every attachment is a constraint; and the union of hearts, in

<sup>1</sup> He always boasted of this natural, primitive and hidden kindness (*douceur*). 'It is true, he wrote to Mme de Scudéry (16 July 1672), that I am naturally kind and affectionate; so I have chosen for my device a beehive, with this motto:

*Sponte favos, ægre spicula;*

Kindness is natural, the sting is foreign.

But intercourse with the world, which generally has no good influence, has given me the sting on necessary occasions . . . His kindness was therefore, by his own confession, a *very corrected* kindness.

which reasonable people find the only pleasure that there is in life, appears an intolerable yoke'. Bussy's real attachment only came quite at the last for the Comtesse de Montglat, who requited it so badly, and who, by her perfidy, left in his heart a cankered and malignant sore of which he was at great pains to cure himself.

As a soldier Bussy distinguished himself during twenty-five years (1634-1659) by bold qualities and brilliant services which, if he had been more careful in his conduct and more sparing of his wit, would almost infallibly have won him the baton of a Marshal of France. But by his slanders and his character he soon alienated the generals whom he was most proud to have for his judges. At the siege of Mardick (August 1646), the enemy having made a sortie, not content with driving them from his trench, Bussy, at a word from the Duc de Nemours, executed a sort of wager which he himself calls a piece of madness: he ventured with a small company of chosen men to drive and hurl back the bulk of the attacking party to their own palisades, with the result that at the first discharges the majority of his men, and the most conspicuous for their courage, were *hors de combat*; but having had only two horses killed under him, he still held his ground in this aimless attack and made it a point of honour to see the enemy retire first: the Duc d'Enghien (the great Condé) was obliged to command him to retreat, adding that, 'if he had to choose a second in the army, he would take no other than Bussy'.

We might apply to this occasion and divert to our Bussy what Saint-Evremond said of his name-sake (the Bussy d'Amboise of the sixteenth century), that there appeared to be something *vain* and *audacious* in his bravery.

This praise of the great Condé delighted Bussy, and we must do him this justice that, however ill-treated he was by that prince on other occasions, no one ever portrayed him with more enthusiasm and fire in his martial beauty. At this same trench before Mardick, at the moment of dislodging the enemy, Bussy, who entered from one side, ran up against the Duc d'Enghien, who was mounting from the other, cutting down all who came in his way.

'I cannot think of the condition in which I found this prince, he says, but I seem to see one of those pictures where the pain-

ter has exerted his imagination to represent a Mars in the heat of combat. The wristband of his shirt was blood-stained from the hand which held the sword. I asked him if he was not wounded.—No, he said, it is the blood of those rascals . . .’

And even in that satirical *Histoire des Gaules*, he portrays him as follows :

‘ Prince Tiridate (*the great Condé*) had bright eyes, a thin aquiline nose, gaunt and hollow cheeks, a long face, and the physiognomy of an *eagle* ; curly hair, irregular and badly kept teeth, a careless appearance, and little attention paid to his person, a handsome figure. A passionate but not a well-balanced mind. He often laughed and very disagreeably. He had a wonderful genius, and especially for war : on the day of a battle he was very gentle with his friends, fierce with his enemies ; in clearness of mind, power of judgment and facility he was unequalled. He had faith and probity on great occasions, and he was by nature insolent and inconsiderate ; but adversity had taught him good manners . . .’

We see that Bussy had a talent for painting physiognomies and characters, and for concentrating opposites into one point of view, under one glance. ‘ Especially his portraits, said Saint-Evremond, have a *careless, spontaneous, original* grace, which is inimitable’. We may verify his praise with that single example.

Dissatisfied with the Prince of Condé, Bussy was not able to keep on any better terms with M. de Turenne : he served under the latter after the Fronde (1653–1659). Bussy appears to believe that he only failed to win the friendship of the great captain through not having made him a proper complimentary speech on the first day, and he utters his *Mea culpa* for the omission. But it seems rather that what injured him in the mind of Turenne as of all the superiors with whom he came in contact, was his inclination to mockery, sarcasm and malicious verses. *A maker of witticisms, a bad character*, said Pascal : Bussy came opportunely to explain this thought. That was precisely the grievance that Louis XIV had against him when he said : ‘ M. de Bussy has jested about some persons whom I love’. That was likewise what M. de Turenne reproached him with, one day when Bussy complained of not having been treated by him on various occasions with more friendliness : ‘ He (*M. de Turenne*) answered me that he had been assured that I was not

one of his friends, and that even though I gave him my word that I was, if any misfortune should happen to him in war, I would be the man to jest about it'. It was awkward for Bussy to have given all the world such an idea of himself, and especially M. de Turenne, and to have been judged incapable of resisting the pleasure of ridiculing people. Now we must admit one quality in Bussy: he is vain, boastful, given to jeer and scoff, witty and malicious, but at bottom, quite at the bottom of all that, if we may venture to say so, there is a good mind. He gets the better of his discontents and his personal rancours in the judgment he pronounces upon men. With regard to M. de Turenne for example, he has given us a very fine and very firmly-drawn portrait of him, by no means flattered, but by no means unjust. It was said at the time that this portrait was not of a nature to please the house of Bouillon. What does it matter! it is worthy to be accepted by history and to be meditated upon by the moralist. I cannot refrain from giving it here almost in full, after the portrait of Condé which we have just read:

'Henri de La Tour, Vicomte de Turenne, was of medium height, broad in the shoulders, which he shrugged from time to time when speaking; those are habits which one ordinarily contracts through not being quite at one's ease. He had thick and bunched eyebrows, which gave him an unhappy expression.

'He had been in war so often, that with his good judgment and an extraordinary devotion to his profession, he had become the greatest captain of his age.

'To hear him speak in council, he would appear to be the most irresolute of men; yet, when he was urged to make up his mind, nobody did so more quickly or to better purpose.

'His real talent, which is in my opinion the most valuable in war, consisted in mending a bad business. When he was in presence of the enemy, and in inferior number, there was no ground of which, by means of a rivulet, a ravine, a wood or an eminence, he was not able to take advantage.

'Until the last eight years of his life, he was more circumspect than enterprising . . . His caution came from his temperament, his boldness from his experience.<sup>1</sup>

'He had a great breadth of mind capable of ruling a State

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<sup>1</sup> A year before the death of this great man, Bussy wrote to the Bishop of Verdun (19 July 1674): 'I am informed that M. de Turenne has just again driven back the rear-guard of the enemy. He is a real conqueror, he is no longer recognizable; Fabius is become an Alexander'.

as well as an army. He was not ignorant of belles-lettres; he knew something of the Latin poets, and a thousand fine passages from the French poets; he was fond of witticisms and a good judge of them.

'He was modest in dress and even in expressions. One of his great qualities was contempt of worldly goods. No man ever cared so little about money . . .

'He was fond of the fair sex, but without becoming attached to any woman; he was fond enough of the pleasures of the table, but without over-indulgence; he was good company; he knew a thousand stories; he took a delight in telling them, and he told them well.

'During the last years of his life he was honest (that is to say, *easy of access, affable*) and fond of doing good; he was equally loved and esteemed by officers and men; and, with regard to glory, he was so far above the rest of the world, that others' fame could not disturb him'.

If we looked for Bussy's causticity, we might find it in the last touch: but we must admit that here it seems to be quite in agreement with true observation of humanity.

As a sort of illustration and proof of this distinctive superiority of Turenne's talent, which consisted in making the best of a dangerous situation, and mending it by dint of skilful application to details, of tenacity and caution, Bussy, in his *Memoirs*, is pleased to recount in this sense the operations of the Flemish campaign of 1656, during which Turenne gave proof of all those combined qualities which characterize his first military manner. Bussy makes a point of initiating us into the spirit of this campaign, one of the most glorious for Turenne, though not by any means one of the most brilliant: 'I could very well keep silent on this action, he writes on the subject of one of the engagements in this campaign; and perhaps the Marshal's flatterers did not know of it or were not expert enough to remark it; but neither friendship nor hatred will make me fall short in my devotion to the truth'. In general Bussy may be a fault-finder and wanting in wisdom, but he is not a liar. 'And to show, he says again, that I speak from love of the truth rather than from any natural malignity, I will speak well, when I am able to do so, of the same person of whom I have spoken ill'. In this respect Bussy's judgment is better than his character.

This same love of the truth, of historic and human

reality, makes him avoid all those exaggerations which one is so easily drawn into when telling of great actions which one has witnessed or taken part in. On the night before the Battle of the Dunes, he is lying wrapped up in his cloak on the sand, quite close to M. de Turenne. They both go to sleep. An hour afterwards the Marshal is roused, and a page is brought to him who has escaped from the enemy's camp, and upon whose report his purpose of giving battle next day is confirmed. 'And after that, says Bussy, he lay down again merely to rest; for I have too good an opinion of him to believe that with a battle to be fought six hours after, in which his life was the least thing that was at stake, he could sleep as peacefully as if he had had nothing to do on the morrow. And when they come and tell us that, on the day of the Battle of Arbela, they had difficulty in waking Alexander, I believe, if that was the case, that he was pretending to sleep through vanity, or that he was drunk. For my part, *I am natural*, and I slept only an hour. After I had been roused I could not go to sleep again . . . ' We see very well wherein Bussy's Turenne is not like the Condé of the Funeral Oration, of whom Bossuet said before Rocroy: 'It is well known that on the next day, at the appointed hour, they had to rouse this second Alexander out of a deep sleep'. I leave it to those who have had the honour of being present at that kind of feast by the side of heroes, to decide which of the two stories appears to them nearer to the truth.

Of all the generals under whom he served, Bussy got on with none so well as with the Prince of Conti, brother of the great Condé. He portrays him, according to his custom, with a few rapid and felicitous pencil-strokes:

'He had a very fine head, both as regards face and hair, and it was a great pity that he was deformed; for, but for that, he was a perfect prince. He had been intended for the Church; but the adversities of his house having thrown him into the profession of arms, he took such a liking to it that he did not again leave it. Meanwhile he had studied and made wonderful progress. Mentally he was quick, clear, lively, *inclined to raillery*; he had an invincible courage; and, if there was anybody in the world as brave as the Prince of Condé, it was the Prince his brother. No man ever had a more disinterested soul than he: he held money as nothing. He was kind and

affectionate to his friends, and, as he was convinced that I was very fond of him, he honoured me with a very particular affection'.

Such was the prince under whom Bussy desired to serve in Catalonia during the campaign of 1654 ; he got on very well with that general who liked raillery, and who mixed wit and playfulness even with the orders that he issued. But the Prince of Conti was a generalissimo who had mistaken his profession ; the real generals and statesmen could never pardon Bussy that turn of mind which was so contrary to order and command, and which destroyed all respect in serious things.

In the year 1648 Bussy launched into a strange affair, which contributed not a little to his reputation as an adventurer and a man of daring in the matter of love as in everything. Having lost his first wife, and desiring to marry again, 'seeking some money, he says, because he knew that it is of great service in helping one to great honours', he had allowed himself to be persuaded by a few meddling go-betweens that a young and very rich widow, Mme de Miramion, was very anxious to marry him, but that she wanted to appear to be constrained to give a consent which her family would not have approved of. Thereupon Bussy, daring as he was, and not needing to be told a second time that a woman was in love with him, or to be encouraged to do a rash deed, resolved to carry off the widow. He left the army in Flanders for that purpose, having first made sure of the Prince of Condé's protection, and went to carry out his bold design in full daylight near Saint-Cloud, at the head of a troop of horsemen. Mme de Miramion was carried off in spite of her cries ; Bussy took her to a fortress twenty-five leagues away, and did not let her go till the last extremity, and after being more than convinced that his *Hélène* (as he calls her) was by no means a consenting party to the enterprise. This scandalous ambush, which recalled all the deeds of violence of the feudal epochs, and in which Bussy besides played the part of a dupe, made him miss the Battle of Lens which was fought in the interval. He expresses regret at this circumstance, but he never felt sufficiently ashamed of his wrongs towards a weak and courageous woman who nearly died under the blow, and



who, from that moment, became a mother of charity and a saint.

Be this as it may, in spite of all his faults, his love of pleasures, his well-known taste and irresistible talent for epigrams and satirical songs, with his disorderly conduct, his grain of licentiousness and free-thinking, his mania for gambling, in which he had an insolent luck, Bussy, about 1659, was in a good way to attain to the highest military fortune, when the peace came and threw him without any occupation upon his perilous penchants. In a celebrated orgy in which he took part, in spite of his forty years and more, with some rakes of his acquaintance, during the Holy Week of 1659, he was accused, not without some likelihood, of having composed some couplets, some horrible *Hallelujahs* which insulted both the divine majesty and the human majesties ; and, from this moment having become an object of particular suspicion to the Queen-mother and the King, instead of keeping a watch over his actions, he committed more and more acts of imprudence. The greatest of them was to write in 1660, under very thin disguises, the *Histoire amoureuse* of two or three Court ladies, and to lend the manuscript to other ladies of his intimate acquaintance ; several copies of the work were in circulation, and it was printed outside of France in 1665. Thirteen months in the Bastille, a broken career, seventeen years of forced banishment, ten more years of a so-called voluntary banishment, a perpetual disgrace, in which he died in 1693, such were the consequences of this serious moral and literary error, which, by reason of the misfortune and the results, justified a comparison of poor Bussy's destiny with that of Ovid.

After reading the book to-day one is not surprised that a king like Louis XIV should have judged with that severity a fault of such a nature, which confirmed so many others. Such books are, in reality, opposed to the foundations of the order and stability even of States. In this *Histoire amoureuse des Gaules* Bussy took Petronius as his model and ideal ; there are moments when he merely translates him, and (strange to say !), even when translating him he appeared to be only relating contemporary truths and particulars. Let us say what we honestly think : these disorders, these moral turpitudes might be found at all times ; the best epochs are those in which they are hidden

from sight. In the time of Bussy they were almost openly paraded. Still, to choose them for the theme of a work, a history, a *monument for ever*, as Thucydides would say, was to give evidence of a corrupt taste and a depraved mind. That was Bussy's great error, which still lives, which ranks and degrades him in the scale of minds and in the order of natural vocations. This boaster has thereby betrayed what definitely occupied and amused him most, what was his favourite dish<sup>1</sup>. We may add that an undertaking of that nature, on the part of a man of so much wit, and the succeeding vogue for that kind of works, give us a not very lofty idea of the *average* morality of the period and the society in which he wrote. Without taking too much credit to ourselves for the fundamental quality of our souls, it must be here admitted that we have gained infinitely since that time in social and public morality, in external morality.

To judge the matter only from the literary point of view, Bussy's style, the only point that still interests us, shows, in spite of frequent carelessness and incorrect diction, much distinction and delicacy, and is set off by a subtle turn, which already anticipates Hamilton. In describing the Comtesse de Fiesque, he says for example : ' She had brown and bright eyes, a well shaped nose, an agreeable mouth and of a good colour, a white and smooth complexion, a long shape of face : *she alone in the world had embellished herself with a pointed chin*'. That is merely a trifle, but do you observe how it is expressed ? The Portraits of Mme de Châtillon, of Mme de Montglat, have the same half-subtle and half-naïve grace. This Mme de Montglat, whom he was most in love with, is presented with a quite particular complacency : ' Mme *Bélise* has small, dark and bright eyes, an agreeable mouth, a slightly turned-up nose, neat and handsome teeth, too brilliant a complexion, refined and delicate features, and an agreeable facial outline. She has long, black and thick hair. She is clean to the last degree, and the air she exhales is more pure than that she draws in . . . ' You will remark that word *clean* (*propre*) which recurs rather

<sup>1</sup> A simple observation may suffice to sum up Bussy's rather corrupt literary tastes : he was very fond of Ovid, he had not read Horace, and in his extreme old age he amused himself with translating a little licentious Latin tale of the poet Théophile.

frequently in Bussy, a word that would not be used at present, but which it was quite proper to use at that time and in the antique sense (*simplex munditiis*). Bussy's language is a pretty language; it is brilliant and shining as it were, not from its colours, but by dint of polish and neatness. In the good passages his style has the *nitour* of the ancients. Somebody, about his time, applied the word and the praise of *urbanity* to three writers who were often compared, Bussy, Pellisson, and Bouhours. But I presume to think that Bouhours' urbanity was never more than that of a college recluse who attempts to be sprightly; Pellisson's urbanity was that of an elegant bourgeois who is a little deficient in etiquette and Court ceremony; the urbanity of Bussy, in his good moments, was the only one of the three which entirely suggested the easy courtier and man of the world.

'He has been lauded a thousand times, somebody said of him in his day, for the polish of his wit, the delicacy of his thoughts, a noble liveliness, a subtle *naïveté*, an always natural and always new turn, *a certain language which makes every other language appear barbarous*'. That is saying much, and I must observe besides that these praises are taken from an Academy harangue. You will understand, however, how they could have been spoken, if you will look into the specimens of style that we have indicated.

With regard to the work which suggests these remarks, this delicacy, once more, lies only in the style of the narrator and in a certain turn of speech; for grossness is at the bottom of almost all the persons he describes. Not to speak of the men who, in the matter of conduct, are capable of anything, the women he brings on the scene are passionate, violent, self-interested and grasping. Bussy, in his banishment, remembering the women he had known, said: 'Already in my time they loved money and jewelry more than wit, youth and beauty'. We must pity Bussy for not having met any other kind of woman at a period which could show a Sévigné, a La Fayette, and many others. But what am I saying? into this shameless History or scandalous Chronicle of his time, did he not contrive to put, by the side of Mme d'Olonne and Mme de Montglat, his own cousin, that charming Mme de Sévigné herself!

It was only in keeping with the character of the man who had outraged in Mme de Miramion the future mother of the poor and almost a Mother of the Church, that he should have outraged in Mme de Sévigné the most virtuous of the Graces.

The portrait which Bussy has drawn of Mme de Sévigné in that odious book is both like and slanderous ; it is the masterpiece of a malicious and caustic painter who gives to each of the features he observes and brings out, I know not what particular expression which darkens and disfigures the whole. Bussy, by the way, paid dearly for this cruel and cutting portrait. Reconciled with Mme de Sévigné during his banishment, pardoned and amnestied by her, he had very often to begin again to cry *mercy*. She had forgiven him his insult, but only on condition of always remembering it and recalling it to his memory. ' Rise up, Count, I will not kill you while you are down, she wrote to him when he pretended to be on his knees : or take up your sword again to recommence our battle. . . ' In the midst of peace, in the midst of friendship, a word, a sudden sally of this innocent mocker, betrayed her old rancour, and showed that she was henceforth sensible of possessing every advantage over him. Bussy, indeed, would have been humbled if he had been capable of it. He had begun by frankly admitting all his wrongs, but he expressed his regrets in a manner which proves how much on this point he thought more of the matters of the mind than those of the heart. ' Do you not think, he wrote to his cousin, that it is a great pity that we should have fallen out together for a time, and that *meanwhile* we have missed many opportunities of commenting upon human follies, by which we might have amused each other ? for, although we have neither of us been mute, *it seems to me that we draw each other out, and that we say things to each other that we do not say to others* '. And indeed Bussy had been an excellent instrument, at the beginning, for putting his pretty cousin into the vein and the humour of her epistolary style : he was the man she needed to send back the shuttlecock, as they say ; but he did not perceive, as he proceeded, that she could do very well without him, that she could write the same smart things to others, that she could distribute them on all sides and continually find new ones, and that he himself

was no longer sufficiently animated and alert not to lose by comparison with that superior and natural grace.

Bussy's mind was not one of those which had been touched at birth by the Fairy, and which is renewed to the last by an immortal youth. He may have had a power of his own and a distinct stamp of virility in his observation and in that manner, which he has been praised for, of *suddenly showing his thought, and no more than his thought*: but he had not that living source of grace and imagination which for ever refreshes and fertilizes the ground from which it springs.

Bussy's last infatuation with Mme de Sévigné was that he believed himself to be an essential partner in all her wit.

The correspondence which Bussy kept up during his long exile with a considerable number of friends, both men and women, who had remained attentive and faithful to him, has some value for the history of the period, and, in order to be entirely interesting, it only needs an editor, a Walckenaer or a Monmerqué to repair the text, to restore, if possible, many proper names which are merely indicated by exasperating *asterisks*, and to supply information about the persons. Such as it is, it may still be read with pleasure. Bussy's first care, after retiring to his Burgundy, is to persuade his Parisian friends that he does not feel his misfortune so very much; he tries to believe, and he tries to make everybody believe, that he does not feel any ennui. 'I am very comfortably settled here, he writes from his château of Bussy (19 January 1667); I live well; every day I beautify a beautiful house. I have neither master nor mistress, for I am neither ambitious nor in love; and I feel, what I thought impossible two years ago, that one may live happily without those two passions'. We are not long in perceiving that it is his fixed mania to persuade the world that he is not too unhappy; he knows what the world thinks of the unfortunate; he dreads being spoken of in Paris with a smile of pity. His vanity still masters him in his misfortune.

This would be of little interest if, at the same time, we did not detect contradictions and denials, and if it were not possible, in Bussy's example, to study the human heart and its miseries laid quite bare. At the very moment when he says he is cured of ambition and that he has no master, he writes to the Duc de Saint-Aignan, who is his

principal stand-by with Louis XIV, letters full of praise of the King which are obviously intended to be repeated and shown, and perhaps to prepare the way for his return to Court. The Duc de Saint-Aignan had lost a son, and Louis XIV had granted him I know not what favour to console him. 'I was so infinitely grateful to the King, writes Bussy to the Duke, for the manner in which His Majesty comforted you, that this master appeared to me worthy of being served by the whole world. *He is the only one in the world with whom one could find any comfort for the loss of one's children*, however estimable they may have been'. The words appear unfeeling and revolting in their adulation and platitude, but Bussy is at least clear and does not haggle over his expressions.

A more honourable, a more excusable sentiment is that which Bussy preserves for the woman he loved most (Mme de Montglat), and who suddenly dropped him in his misfortune. He feels it deeply, he is embittered; nay, he is astonished, though he appeared to esteem the sex so little. With regard to this faithless creature he expresses painful, almost touching regrets. I recommend especially a certain letter of the 20 January 1668, addressed to Mlle d'Armentières, the refrain of which, repeated three or four times, is:

Cela soit dit en passant  
Pour celle que j'aimais tant.

A good judge has pointed out to me that there is a little of Musset in that letter, something of Musset accusing his faithless one, minus the cry of poetry. Our cunning friend never had any poetry, either in prose or in verse. In this case at least we are sensible of a real lament, a sigh, something human. Honour to Bussy for this note of the heart! It is one of those letters that Fontenelle could never have written.

But what is less beautiful and less touching, is that Bussy had in one of his châteaux a portrait gallery, which contained the different women he had known and loved. He had hung Mme de Montglat there, and at the foot of the portrait was a cruel inscription. Then there were endless sarcastic mottoes aimed at her person. Still following his old bad habits, Bussy could not help,

even in his exile and solitude, parading his amours and his vengeance.

The war breaks out (April 1667). How heart-rending for Bussy! 'All the old and young courtiers of your acquaintance, somebody writes to him, are going to the war'. Bussy wishes to do the same; he writes to the Duc de Noailles: 'How is it possible for me to see it without taking part'! Here the servility of his tone may almost be excused by his anxiety to re-enter into the favour of the master he would like to serve: it is not so much the courtier as the soldier that is aroused in him. But when Louis XIV in person crosses Burgundy at the head of his army, in the winter of 1668, when the conquest of the Franche-Comté is about to take place before Bussy's eyes and *at his very door*, he can bear it no longer, and he gives vent to his grief. 'I am almost in despair, he exclaims, when I think that I shall have lived in a reign full of marvels, in which the meanest soldier of the Guards will have a greater share than I'.

Louis XIV was implacable and frigid; he put Bussy off from campaign to campaign: 'Not yet for this one, we shall see about another', he replied to the perpetual solicitations which were addressed to him in the name of the poor disgraced man; and the years passed, and Bussy, disappointed again and again, still hoped. There were some little favours, or at least he thought them such, which kept him alive. In 1673, the King allowed him to spend a little time in Paris for his affairs. The same in 1676. In 1681, he was able to prolong at his pleasure this visit to Paris; and in 1682, on the 12 April the King was so gracious as to recall him to Court! Let us hear the naïve confession of this humbled boaster:

'On that day then I cast myself at the feet of the King, who received me so well that my affection for him contracted my heart; I was unable to speak and could only express my joy and gratitude by my tears.

'For eight days I was greatly pleased with my Court, after which I became aware that the King avoided looking at me; after making the same observation for another two months, I wished to try whether I could not come to a better understanding by speaking to His Majesty. It is true that he answered me so coldly, that I could not doubt that I was in some new disgrace.

' You may judge, my children, what was my grief on this occasion ; it was so great that I absented myself from the Court for five years, unable to bear the coolness of a master whose good reception had still increased my affection . . . '

Such was the condition and the soul of a courtier in the time of Bussy, in the time of Sosie in Molière's *Amphitryon*. You will remember that first delightful scene in which the witty valet, in exposing his miseries, is only describing the slavery and the chains which attach the courtiers of that day to the Great :

Cependant notre âme insensée  
S'acharne au vain honneur de demeurer près d'eux,  
Et s'y veut contenter de la fausse pensée  
Qu'ont tous les autres gens, que nous sommes heureux.  
Vers la retraite en vain la raison nous appelle,  
En vain notre dépit quelquefois y consent,  
Leur vue a sur notre zèle  
Un ascendant trop puissant,  
Et la moindre faveur d'un coup-d'œil caressant  
Nous rengage de plus belle.

Great hearts of these days, do not smile so much at the courtier of the olden time. Have you not also your idolatry and your Louis XIV, the worship of popularity ? You have only changed your master.

In every epoch there are certain maladies and prevailing affections which afflict the souls of men in general : it requires great strength and a very healthy mind to resist them. Those souls which were more ardent than elevated, such as Bussy's, had the maladies of their time ; let us ask ourselves, before despising them too much, whether we do not suffer from the maladies of our time.

Saint-Évremond was wiser, even in those days. Seeing Bussy's attempts to reappear at Court, aged, worn out, behind the fashions, and compromising, before a new generation of courtiers, even his reputation as a man of wit : ' When a man, he said, has renounced fortune by his own fault, and when he has been pleased to do all that M. de Bussy has done with deliberate purpose, he should spend the rest of his days in retirement, and sustain *with a certain dignity* an unpleasant part that he has inopportunely taken upon himself '. Saint-Évremond was entitled to be severe ; for, placed in the same situation as



Bussy and fallen into a like disgrace, he resisted the temptation of a return ; he lived and died a philosopher.

Bussy was not made of the same stuff. He thought 'that a dose of adversity is sometimes wholesome'; but this dose only worked upon him at intervals, and did not entirely cure him. Half Christian, half philosopher, half superstitious, always carried away by his passions, he was never able to adopt a definite course ; but what he became more and more as he grew older, was a man of letters. He had been elected to the French Academy in time, just a month before his disgrace and his imprisonment (March 1665). He made his entry into that company with a complimentary address which he preserved and which had all the *deliberation* of a Colonel of light cavalry. 'If I were at the head of the Cavalry and obliged to address them before leading them into battle, etc., etc.', he said at the opening of his address, and he continued in the same tone, pretending to be more astonished at having to speak before the Academy than before a battle front. This exordium, of a quite cavalier-like modesty, was a great success. Letters, which Bussy had loved from his childhood, were faithful to him : they owed it to him, for we may say that they were largely concerned in his misfortune. Into that so culpable indiscretion which had been the cause of his ruin, there entered a great deal of the paternal solicitude of the man of letters who is unwilling to waste what he has once written, and who intends to reap praise for it, even at the price of some esteem. When Bussy had his semblance of a return of the King's favour in 1682, the Academy sent a deputation to congratulate him. M. Bazin, in an excellent Notice on Bussy, commenting on this proceeding, found occasion to ridicule it and was pleased to regard it as a blunder. For my part, I prefer to look upon it as a delicate attention, in which, though we may be deceived with regard to its real object, there was some real comfort. Infatuated, as he was on the score of birth and his ancestors, Bussy esteemed intellect and was as sensible to it as to anything else. He was among the first to declare himself against the *fools of quality* 'who would have liked to persuade the world, if they had been able to do so, that to be intellectual was derogatory to nobility'. He always had a great regard for men of letters; and, whilst affecting to

be distinguished from them, he treated them with perfect deference. Finding that Boileau had placed his name at the end of a line and in a somewhat equivocal sense, although he was so sensitive and the allusion was hardly flattering, he did not appear to take offence. ' Besides, he added, Despréaux is a fellow of wit and very deserving of my love '. Intimate with the Sarasins, the Benserades, and those old *beaux esprits* whom he still called the *virtuosi*; he had the tact and the good taste to accept, to divine original and budding deserts: he was one of the first to appreciate and to encourage La Bruyère. ' He had, said Mme Du Deffand, his fellow-countrywoman and his emulator in satire, he had much wit and very cultivated, a very correct taste, great power of discriminating men and works, he reasoned very consistently; an excellent style, neither studiously elegant nor contorted, without any affectation (*here we might find occasion to dispute her judgment*); never wordy nor prolix, rendering all his thoughts with infinite truth; all his Portraits are very like and very striking '. This is praise, which, coming from a person who was not lavish of it, has some weight. In short, to conclude with Bussy from the literary side, he has his epoch in the history of the language; he is a grammarian, a purist, who seeks and finds the propriety of terms. ' He wrote laboriously, said somebody who knew him well <sup>1</sup>, but the readers lost nothing; *what he wrote cost no one trouble but himself* '. Bussy is something of a Vaugelas; and besides, in the branch of letter-writing, he forms a link between Voiture and Mme de Sévigné. He holds his own against Mme de Sévigné in his first manner; he is a happy stimulus to her. In short, vanquished and a culprit, he remains for ever harnessed to her chariot; and this man, so vain, so enamoured of his quality and himself, will survive especially on that account, which is that of his wrongs and his defeat, and he will also survive because he had the honour of being, in his time, reluctantly perhaps, and at the same time with some intent, not a mere amateur, but one of the excellent *artisans* of our language. Of all his half-missed vocations, not one of which had its full play, it was still his literary instinct which failed him least.

Whatever still remains to be said about Bussy may be

<sup>1</sup> M. de La Rivière, Bussy's son-in-law.

found in M. Walckenaer and in the already mentioned Notice of M. Bazin. My intention was merely to add a few impressions, derived from reading, to their accurate and coherent labours, to the so complete developments of the one, and the so clear résumé of the other.

## MADAME ÉMILE DE GIRARDIN<sup>1</sup>

*Monday, February 17, 1851.*

AND first I will draw a circle round my subject, and will say to my thought and my pen : *Thus far and no further.* Within this circle, this indispensable frame that should surround the picture of every beautiful and witty woman, there shall not enter, at least not without much difficulty and resistance on my part, the clamours and reverberations of politics and satire, nor any reminiscences of controversies, all those subjects that lie so near at hand and to which, if we were not on our guard, so rich a subject might easily attract us. I will consider in Mme de Girardin only the woman, the poetess of society and the stage, the moralist of the world and the drawing-room, Delphine, Corinne, and the Vicomte Charles de Launay, nothing but that. You see that I am modest, that I boldly elude difficulties, and that I am not the man to stir up a hornet's nest.

Mlle Delphine Gay, who was destined to enjoy an early celebrity, was born at the fairest dawn of the Imperial sun, at Aix-la-Chapelle, where her father was Receiver-General, and she was baptized, so they say, on the tomb of Charlemagne. Do you not already see from here the century in vista, with its grand pretensions on the one hand, and its positive vocation on the other : the tomb of Charlemagne for scenery and background, and quite near by the cash-box of the Receiver-General ? As a child she was brought up in the lap of luxury and elegance, surrounded by a certain poetical, external and military ideal, which the Empire favoured. She grew up under the eyes of an intellectual mother, devoted to the world, who brought some verve and a sort of imagination into her pleasantries, subtilty and sentimentality into her novels

<sup>1</sup> *Poésies.—Élégies.—Napoléon.—Cléopâtre.—Lettres parisiennes, etc., etc.*

and who figured in her day, as our old Brantôme would say, at the head of the *squadron* of beautiful women of her time. The daughter, who was as fair as her mother was dark, was not less beautiful, her beauty being of the kind that is immediately apparent and that one would no more think of disputing than the sun's beauty. She early became the object of a beauty-worship and idolatry, which reacted upon her at the same time that she inspired it. The Empire had fallen; the Restoration was coming in with new fashions and a complete change of scenery, though with a good number of the old characters: it was the period of drawing-room piety, of the most refined aristocracy, of the most wit-seasoned elegance. In this factitious world Mlle Delphine Gay made her début at the age of fifteen; she made it her first and only horizon, and in it she developed (it is piquant to remark) with a naturalness, a gaiety, and a certain abundance and richness of nature which only needed to expand. She many times regarded and painted herself in this first attitude and this first brilliancy of her blooming youth:

Mon front était si fier de sa couronne blonde,  
Anneaux d'or et d'argent tant de fois caressés !  
Et j'avais tant d'espoir quand j'entrai dans le monde  
Orgueilleuse et les yeux baissés !

We will quickly add that if she calls herself proud and haughty, if she knows herself to be beautiful and often admired herself, she remained gay, frank at first, without any grimace, animated and even naïve in her movements, good-natured, as all say who knew her at that time (Lamartine indeed said of her one day: *She is a good fellow* !); in short, as natural in the midst of the artificial, as true in the midst of the unreal, as it is possible to be. It was then that she was seen, that she was *made*, to pose and stand out as a Muse, and that she was saluted as a Corinne. 'Yes, I have been repeatedly assured by an amiable witness and one of the most intelligent of the time, yes, she was at once beautiful, simple, inspired as the Muse, laughing and good-natured (that is the unanimous word), and such as she afterwards described her *Napoléon*, that is to say still herself,

Naïve en sa gaieté, rieuse et point méchante ;

reciting poetry with elegance and an air of grandeur as she did at the time. This is as like her, you may be sure, as her portrait by Hersent, where she has that *light-blue* scarf, the colour of her eyes'.

It was thus that she long remained in the memory of those who saw her in the sun's ray. Imagine her at a grand soirée given by the Duchesse de Duras, or better still at a brilliant *matinée* at the Château of Lormois, the residence of the Duchesse de Maillé, in the full summer sun-light, imagine this laughing child, with her profusion of fair hair and that exuberance of life which makes one joyful, escaping into the park, running and leaping, then suddenly called in, and in the most elegant of drawing-rooms, before the most select of circles, reciting poetry with a solemn air, with an inspired brow, a profile lightly suggestive of an antique muse, with a precise and sonorous tone of voice, reciting a canto of her *Madeleine*, or her *Elegy* (so often rewritten) on *the Happiness of being beautiful*, and say whether it was not enough to dazzle one and make one surrender.

The poets especially, those who grouped themselves in the Collection of the *Muse française*, Guiraud, Vigny, Hugo, Deschamps, loved then to predict for Delphine, as they called her quite fraternally, the crown of *Lyric Elegy*: 'Her quite young talent, said one of those faithful witnesses to me, whom I questioned in order to be just, must have combined a mixture of masculine strength with the sensibility of a *woman of the world*, more affected by society matters than by the sights of nature; nervous rather than tender, sorrowful rather than melancholy: the whole marching in concert with much real intelligence, without affectations, manifesting itself in a form of versification that was pure, correct, learned even and at that time rather new. Soumet appeared to be her model'. And they kept repeating around her that name of Corinne which she was incessantly invoking:

Elle chante, et, devant son écharpe légère,  
Corinne courberait l'orgueil de son laurier.

Mme de Staël's Corinne was, in fact, the grand ideal at that time for every celebrated woman. Mlle Delphine Gay, who by reason of her baptismal name was already a sister of Corinne, desired something more and better;

she wished to equal and rival in everything this sister of genius, and she devoted herself to that end with an evident sincerity in those years of her début. Distinguished and crowned by the French Academy in 1822 for having sung of the self-sacrifice of the Sisters of Saint Camille during the plague at Barcelona, Mlle Gay never ceased since then to celebrate in verse all the important public events, monarchical or patriotic solemnities, the death of General Foy, the coronation of Charles X, the insurrection in Greece, all the beautiful themes of the moment. On one occasion we see her reciting, from the cupola of the Pantheon, her Hymn to Saint Geneviève, in honour of Gros' paintings. During her visit to Rome, in 1827, she was received at the capital a member of the *Academy of the Tiber*; after that she made a pilgrimage, still in the character of Corinne, to Cape Misenum. All this offered a pretext for saying around her, and suggested the idea to herself, that she was not only an Elegiac Muse, but also the *Muse of the Fatherland*. A few pieces of poetry published by her during these latter years show that she is not yet completely cured of that idea, and that there are moments when she speaks as if she had really wielded the sword of Charlemagne from her cradle.

Let us return and ask ourselves, when we now read those poems in Mme de Girardin's first manner, what we are to think of them.

I say her first manner, for Mme de Girardin has already had three manners, if you please, three distinct poetic forms; the first form, regular, classical, brilliant and sonorous, which may be traced to Soumet; the second form, which dates from *Napoline*, more free, more dashing, with the modern cut, where Musset's influence steps in; lastly the third form, which she displayed in *Cléopâtre*, and in which she allows herself, when it suits her, all the liberties in versification of the modern drama. It is remarkable that women, clever and superior though they may be, rarely find their own forms; they employ them well, but they are borrowed from another. Of these three forms, we may say that it is the first, that of Racine seen through Soumet, that Mme de Girardin would have followed by preference and most naturally, if she had been left to herself.

Mme de Girardin has, above all, the sense of the external

world, of the beauty which is comformable to it, of the regularity of lines and contours, of elegance: that is what we find in her Elegies. As for the pieces which are devoted to celebrating public events, they need not be spoken of. But in her first Elegies (*Ourika*, *Il m'aimait*, *Natalie*, etc.), there is some movement; they have some happy, sometimes brilliant lines, others which are subtle or witty. Ourika, the negress, says very well of the man she loves, and who is unaware of her love:

Et si parfois mes maux troublaient son âme tendre,  
L'ingrat ! il m'appelait sa sœur !

In society, one of these pretty lines, one of those pretty phrases (*l'ingrat !*), is quite sufficient to supply poetical entertainment for a whole evening, and especially when the poet himself is there, brilliant, witty and handsome, displaying himself in person.

It is remarkable how that perpetual and absorbing idea of physical beauty dominates all the Elegies of Mlle Delphine Gay, and is as it were their direct and declared inspiration. This beautiful girl cannot as a rule detach her imagination from the conventional types (French Knight, Handsome Dunois, Muse of the Fatherland); she clings to these types, naturally and in good faith, but too idolatrously and too much from the outside. We feel that, from the very beginning, the inner, intimate source is not very abundant, and that this chivalry of the head and the heart, which for a moment arouses the enthusiasm of the poetess, cannot long hold out against the intellectual power which is present in the same person, and which will baffle all. There is in Mme de Girardin a man of great intelligence (afterwards disguised as the Vicomte de Launay), who killed the poetess in her; not indeed killed, for the poetess still appears at times with her mask, her cuirass, her Clorinda's helmet, her skilful, easy and bold sword-play, her thrusts of fine verses in the tirades, and her flashes as it were in the fray; but all this staging and magnificent machinery cannot impose upon those who have once known the nature of real poetry. The latter only makes a momentary appearance and without any serious purpose, as in a tournament.

And yet, in spite of the man of so much intelligence who calls himself the Vicomte de Launay, there will always



be in Mme de Girardin a certain type, a certain primitive chivalric mould which he will not succeed in destroying. Even in her most intellectual epoch, when she shows the most consummate knowledge of the world and the most consummate spirit of raillery, she has, I say, those singular and impetuous relapses into the Jeanne d'Arc and amazon type, which are only conceivable in a Muse that has remained naïve. Even in her newspaper articles she has her dithyrambic revivals. She will write, for example, some lines against a certain vote of the Chamber of Deputies (13 April 1839), a vote which I do not, by the way, pretend to approve of; and she wrote in November 1848, those other famous lines against General Cavaignac, in which, desiring to cleave and exterminate him, she can think of nothing stronger to administer to him in her anger, because the worthy General slept for an hour on a June evening, than this final crushing blow:

Vive l'Endymion de la guerre civile!

A strange insult, coming from a beautiful woman, to call a man *Endymion*. Assuredly it was the only chance General Cavaignac ever had in his life of being compared with the shepherd Endymion.

Mme de Girardin is the cause of my having often set myself these two puzzling problems:

How is it that so much wit and elegance is not always accompanied by good taste, that taste which she herself has somewhere defined so well as *the modesty of the mind*?

And again, how is it that, with so keen and fine a sense of the ridiculous, a person is not always apprised of the ridicule to which she may expose herself under the like circumstances?

To find the answer to these problems, it was necessary to go back to that primitive false ideal of which she was once enamoured.

Thus, an early elegiac sentimentality of which she cured herself, and, side by side with it, a certain worship of chivalric idols from which she has not yet recovered, there we have Mme Emile de Girardin, as, with all her intelligence, she now stands out definitely before our eyes.

Nothing is more poignant than to refer back for a moment to her first poems, to the editions of her first songs which bear a *Harp* on the title-page, after a quite fresh reading

of the lively feuilletons in which there disports itself, in so different a direction, an equally sure talent, a firm and delicate pen, one of the best pens indeed for fighting. If we consider the matter closely, the contradiction is not so great as it appears; the one, I know, led to the other; but how much food for thought the windings of the road afford!

At times (it was the fashion under the Restoration) she wrote religious poems; she sang of Mary Magdalen and of one of the touching miracles of the Saviour. Her first crowned piece begins with an invocation to the Seraphs:

Bienheureux Séraphins, vous, habitants des cieux,  
Suspendez un moment vos chants délicieux ! . . .

These Seraphs, who fall from the sky or the ceiling, are here introduced as, at other times, the Loves and Cupids might have been introduced; they are introduced without being believed in; that is unfortunate, even in poetry. When once a poet has accustomed himself to that factitious style, he cannot afterwards throw it off, and, what is worse, he uses it unconsciously. He loses the sense of the true, of the real true as well as of the ideal true. He ends by believing that with a good share of wit, and an extremely clever sleight of hand, he is able to do, to counterfeit anything: as for counterfeiting, I do not deny it; but with wit alone, he will never produce either feeling, or passion, or nature, or drama, or religion. *Judith*, a sacred tragedy, though written after twenty years interval, still showed traces of that unreal style which produced the poem of the *Madeleine* and those first conventional and drawing-room Seraphs, so worthy of figuring in the chapel of Monseigneur the Abbé Duc de Rohan. And in general it was the stumbling-block, the misfortune of Mme de Girardin as a writer that, with so strong and at times so powerful an organization, that with so many resources at least she should have disported herself always within an artificial and factitious circle, out of which, with her pen or her lyre in her hand, she never stepped.

We are still at what is called the lyre. A great sage, Confucius, said, and I am entirely of his opinion when I read our writers *with their fine phrases*, when I hear our orators *with their fine discourses*, or when I read our poets *with their fine verses*: 'I detest, he said, that which has only a semblance without reality; I detest the tares

lest they destroy the crops ; I detest the cunning man, lest he confound equity ; I detest the flowing mouth, lest it confound the truth . . . ' And I may add, continuing his thought : I detest the so-called beautiful poetry which is nothing but form and sound, lest it be taken for true poetry and usurp its place, lest it disguise and destroy in people's minds that divine reality, which sometimes blazes forth, at other times is humble and modest, but always elevated, always profound, and which reveals itself only at its hour. In *Napoline*, Mme de Girardin wrote a line which betrays her :

Ah ! c'est que l'élégance est de la poésie.

Certainly I would not exclude elegance from poetry, but when I see it placed in the front rank, I am always afraid lest the shape, the fashion, might be preferred before nature, and the outside kill the heart.

What I am saying here Mme de Girardin seems herself to have felt, and she has expressed it in her way better than I. In this poem of *Napoline*, which marks her second epoch (1834), she imagines a young girl, an intimate friend, who thinks herself the daughter of the great man of the century, Napoleon, who is his daughter in fact, in consequence of her mother's sin, and is on that account called Napoline. This young woman whom Mme de Girardin describes with a sister's complacency,

Ayant un peu d'orgueil peut-être pour défaut,  
Mais femme de génie, et femme comme il faut,

has every enthusiasm at first, all the objects of worship and the loves of a young girl's heart, and we may presume to suppose that the poetess has lent her a few of her own. The ideal frame is always the worldly fête, splendour and dress, the glamour of a dazzling ball, a ball at an embassy, and in the middle of it all there appears the handsome, young, pale, wounded, interesting soldier, some Alfred or other. But, from the manner in which Mme de Girardin describes the surroundings, the subordinate characters, the foppish uncle, and the coquettish duchess, and the overdressed heiress, it is evident that she has already taken to the portrait, to delicate and satiric observation. The Vicomte de Launay has come to majority within her ; she looks upon the world as a field of battle where she feels

that she has henceforth a firm footing and that she is able to strike. What a number of pretty lines, of witty and malicious touches! Whilst the disillusioned poetess thus observes and mocks, Napoline still loves and believes: that is the piquancy of this little poem, which has not, it seems to me, been sufficiently understood or appreciated. Napoline is the loving, believing, enthusiastic girl, who is about to suffer her first disappointments and receive her first wounds, from which she will die. Napoline loves, she imagines she is loved in return, and, from a word she overhears she discovers that she is deceived, that she has a rival, and that her lover is unfaithful:

La vierge la plus pure a cet instinct sauvage  
 Qui lui fait deviner une infidélité.  
 Tout l'enfer s'alluma dans son cœur agité . . .

Napoline, however, is a woman, and she contains herself in the first moment:

. . . Elle cause, elle rit ;  
 Comme une femme heureuse, elle fait de l'esprit ;  
 Elle jette des mots piquants ; chacun l'écoute ;  
 Elle est un peu moqueuse et méchante, sans doute ;  
*Son esprit excité venge son cœur souffrant :*  
*Le mal que l'un reçoit, c'est l'autre qui le rend.*

All this is excellent, sincerely felt and forcibly expressed. I will not follow the idea any further. In a final chapter which ends the poem, Mme de Girardin lays bare this idea, and herself provides the key to those who have not found it. This Napoline who in despair kills herself by suffocation, is stifled genius, enervated by the world; she is love and faith expiring in a heart. In a final letter, written in prose, which is supposed to be Napoline's will and confession, but every line of which shows evidence of the most practised prose-writer and observer, the authoress is the first to denounce that *leprosy of egotism* and vanity which so quickly attacks a talent and a soul in the world:

'The tiresome people, says Mme de Girardin (she who was so afraid of tiresome people), lull genius to sleep and do not corrupt it; but the world! . . . the world! . . . it makes us to resemble itself; it pursues us unceasingly with its irony, it attacks our heart; its incredulity wraps us around, its frivolity withers us; it casts its cold glance on our enthusiasm, and stifles it; it sucks up our illusions one by one,

and scatters them to the winds ; it strips us, and when it sees us as miserable as itself, disenchanted, withered, heartless, without virtue, without belief, without passion, and icy cold like itself, then it throws us among its elect, and says with pride : You are one of us, go !'

Truly, one could not say more or express it better ; and when, through this light mask of Napoléone, I heard the last cry and the last protest of the poetess, I seemed to feel then that there was really a poetess in this last form of Delphine.

The whole letter of which I am speaking is written in a very clear, very frank, very *adapted* style ; the very expression seizes and grips the thought closely : that is one of the charms of the Vicomte de Launay. This letter is perhaps the most serious thing that Mme de Girardin has written as a moralist ; for, later, in her *feuilletons* on the Parisian world, she generally keeps to the surface and the social epidermis ; she trifles with her subject, and is pleased to see and describe human nature only between the *Boulevard* and the *Bois*. The heart of things is hidden ; she glides over the surface ; but here she goes deep, she suffers, she cries out. It is something for a heart to have once cried out.

In this letter I already perceive that kind of picturesque pleasantry which is familiar to Mme de Girardin. Napoléone declares that she has no wish for all those little second-rate happinesses, which she might group together to form a complete happiness and make up for that which she has lost. I thought for a moment, she says, ' that I might attain to a negative happiness which might not be without some charm. I imagine to myself a sort of agreeable *paradise of snow . . .* ' A *paradise of snow*, that is one of those phrases which indicate some degree of imagination in her wit, and which so often escape from Mme de Girardin in conversation ; her conversation is quite sprinkled with them. When she tries to be only very witty (and she has only to try to be successful), she appears to have imagination enough in her expression.

These cries of the early expiring poetess, which Napoléone utters in an emblematical and half-ironical state, we might with a little sagacity discover again, and in a direct form, in the little poems entitled *Découragement*, *Désenchantement*, *Désespoir*, in the lines to Madame La Marquise de

La B. . . . These elegies, which form a set and are isolated from their surroundings, might provide us with a sort of Ariadne's thread, if one were needed in a labyrinth which is no labyrinth ; here the Ariadne's thread is hardly necessary, and is quickly broken.

I should like, however, since I am on the subject of poetry and have appeared to set up a comparison between the poetry that is all true, all sincere, with the poetry that is not or only half true, I should like to quote an example of the former as an illustration of what I mean. And, in order to avoid any near-lying and unkind parallel, I will take this example from a poetess of another nation. Mrs. Felicia Hemans, an English poetess of great distinction, of a deep morality, of a natural sensibility, always clothed in imagination and veiled in modesty, also tried to express that bitter and cruel moment, doubly bitter for a poetess and a woman, when the heart weeps over the first flower of hope and illusion which is withered for ever. We will quote the poem, which is entitled :

#### THINGS THAT CHANGE.

Knowest thou that seas are sweeping  
Where cities once have been ?  
When the calm wave is sleeping  
Their towers may yet be seen ;  
Far down below the glassy tide  
Man's dwelling is where his voice hath died !

Knowest thou that flocks are feeding  
Above the tombs of old,  
\* Which kings, their armies leading,  
Have lingered to behold ?  
A short smooth greensward o'er them spread,  
Is all that marks where heroes bled.

Knowest thou that now the token  
Of temples once renowned,  
Is but a pillar, broken,  
With grass and wall-flowers crowned ?  
And the lone serpent rears her young  
Where the triumphant lyre hath sung ?

Well, well I know the story  
Of ages passed away,  
And the mournful wrecks that glory  
Has left to dull decay.  
But thou hast yet a tale to learn  
More full of warnings sad and stern.

Thy pensive eye but ranges  
 O'er ruined fane and hall,  
 Oh ! the deep *soul* has changes  
 More sorrowful than all.  
 Talk not, while these before thee throng,  
 Of silence in the place of song.  
 See scorn—where love has perished ;  
 Distrust—where friendship grew ;  
 Pride—where once nature cherished  
 All tender thoughts and true !  
 And shadows of oblivion thrown  
 Over every trace of idols gone.  
 Weep not for tombs far scattered,  
 For temples prostrate laid—  
 In thy own heart lie shattered  
 The altars it had made.  
 Go, sound its depths in doubt and fear,  
 Heap up no more its treasures *here*.

Let us breathe the discreet and profound sentiment which forms the soul of this admirable lament, let us cull the moral which springs from it, and pass on.

*Cléopâtre* represents, in my opinion, Mme de Girardin's third poetic form. First performed at the Théâtre-Français, on the 13 November 1847, this tragedy was successful for several evenings. I was present at that first performance, and I still enjoy the remembrance of it and of all that brilliant house, of that crowd of the élite of society, of that elegant young world, eager to contribute to a triumph which no one had the bad taste to dispute. The actress was beautiful and entered into her part ; there were some scenes contrived for effect, very theatrical, some dazzling tirades, some actions which revealed the power and the impetuosity of the Muse, a little of Sappho, not a little of Phædra. Was that not enough for a first day ? Off the stage and when reading the play, it was different.

And in the first place do not look for historical truth in *Cléopâtre*, do not expect to find the Rome or the Egypt of that time. At the beginning of the second act where Cleopatra is on the scene, what are we to make of that priest with his mythologico-allegorical lecture ? What are we to make of that learned librarian, to whom the Queen speaks of the *brow of the thinker*, of the independence and almost the royalty of the literary man ? Here we

have a Queen of Egypt who is very well acquainted with the grand phrases of our Parisian men of letters. I remark also that, further on, she speaks with much detail of Cicero, and appears to know him from his speeches. On every occasion, she speaks of the Egyptian climate as if she were unaccustomed to it, as a Parisian lady might speak who feels the heat. Travellers who have been in Egypt have assured me, by the way, that she was confounding the climates, the climate of Alexandria with that of Thebes, which is a hundred and fifty leagues further south: but these are trifling matters. As to the great world interests then in conflict, they are nowhere mentioned. Without a little previous knowledge of the history one would not understand it. The character of Antony is feeble and inconsistent, and is not sufficiently described or explained. The Nile, the Egyptian climate, the African sun, successively become themes for more or less magnificent tirades: but that truth which is the outcome of a thorough understanding of an epoch or of human nature seen in all ages, we must not expect.

Must we scrutinize the texture of the play? At the very opening, why bring in that slave who is admitted to the Queen's favours, who was condemned to die and is saved in order to become a witness against her. But when a man is in love, especially when he is as much in love as Antony is with Cleopatra, those discoveries of infidelity do not estrange, they only inflame him; they make him desire to remain rather than to punish. 'A man usually beats his mistress, said my neighbour, who appeared to be a connoisseur of human nature, he keeps a watch over her, and loves her more than ever'. And then all this machinery, all this first intrigue leads to nothing. But at the opening we had some lively and *risqué* scenes, scenes in which the passion of the fortunate slave is boldly exhibited. I do not know why I call those scenes *risqué*; once they would indeed have endangered the play; to-day they assure its success. They are lively scenes and promising.

They promise even more than they subsequently keep. A man of wit remarked that, in this play, 'Cleopatra begins like Messalina and ends like Artemis'.

I will not follow the play any further in its composition or its characters. The style is assuredly the most note-



worthy side of it, indeed the only noteworthy side ; I will not say that its web appears to me solid, subsistent and commendable in quality ; but it is brilliant, often firm, and always skilful. The great moment is that of the third act, where Cleopatra, seized with a feeling of jealousy and remorse at the sight of what she thinks the happiness of the chaste Octavia, curses her own fiery nature which has led her astray, and launches out into an invective of the African sun, and a long apostrophe in honour of virtue. This is the *bravura* air, a motive for displaying a few fine notes. Taking the style as a whole the authoress has changed, or at least modified her manner. Instead of the old classic verse in all its nobility and purity, we sometimes have some comic touches, bold or even vulgar words, purposely introduced. Evidently the first style after Soumet is dethroned ; we feel that Théophile Gautier has come, and that, in presence of the authoress, he has cast ridicule at the old-fashioned tragedy. And yet, in spite of these disguises, in spite of these foreign grafts, I think I still recognize at bottom much of the former style, the sonorous, specious, quite external line, dropping at times into bombast and at times into mannerism. I find no more of that true naturalness which, born of thought or feeling, and springing from passion itself, penetrates into the whole language and circulates through it like life.

It was remarked that there are some curious developments in the play and some witty conceits after the manner of Seneca : for example, the passage in the fourth act where Antony in his despair endeavours to prove to himself that he has verified, after the event, all Cicero's philippics, and that he has behaved in such a way that all the invectives of that great enemy will henceforth appear to be the words of a *flatterer* :

Flatteur ! . . . j'ai dépassé les rêves de ta haine ! . . .

This whole development is in the style of Seneca, and if it is judged to be in bad taste, it is at least in very distinguished bad taste. Very few persons would be capable of doing as well.

After that, is *Cleopâtre* a tragedy ? Has the authoress succeeded in giving the lie to a certain very impertinent saying of Diderot on women and on their invariable incompleteness ? I do not think so. In spite of the virile talent

displayed in the details and the versification, *Cléopâtre* is not yet what we might call *mascula proles*. It is not cast in one mould ; I may admire the loom, but I do not see the work.

In comedy it is different ; there is a branch of comedy in which Mme de Girardin might be very successful. It is said that she is preparing a new one. She knows the world thoroughly, she perceives and observes all the eccentricities of society ; she possesses the art of portraits ; she has the art of turning out satiric, piquant and gay verses ; she is able and dares to say anything : that is not enough, but that is a great deal. Let us wait.

As a drawing-room moralist and a journalist, Mme de Girardin has created a style of article which is her own and in which she excelled from the first day. There was a moment in her *Napoline* period when she became aware that this iron age did not take kindly to the elegy, especially when it was too long drawn out. And did not the ancient Elegiac poet remark the same thing in his time :

Ferrea non Venerem, sed prædam sæcula laudant.

The Vicomte de Launay felt it, and he whispered it to his sister Delphine, in order to take her place : ' What ! sentiment, romance, nature ; O my sister, have you not yet got beyond that ? I have long been through with all that stuff '. She heard and understood the genius of the time ; she imagined to herself that even the handsome Dunois would not, in our days, go to Syria, but that he would found a newspaper. She said to herself that power, danger, influence lay in that direction. One is not less adored, and one is more feared. She took up her pen and wrote her *Courrier de Paris*, she kept the chronicle of the drawing-rooms, and kept society in order. In my eyes the Vicomte de Launay resembles a handsome Knight of Malta who makes war against the corsairs, whilst he is a little of a corsair himself. And who is not a little of a corsair nowadays ?

Take note, I pray you, of the two extreme points of her career. Starting from the drawing-rooms of the high aristocracy under the Restoration, those exclusive salons in which she still keeps a foothold and has her free entries, Mme de Girardin finds herself at one time thrown into the

quite artistic, quite literary, and, in its way, artificial world of journalism. She wishes to unite the two worlds, the two eddies, the two *genres*; she is successful, but she suppresses and counts as nothing many real things, universal and natural to this time, which lie between the two. Thus it is that with so many of the qualities of the observer, she has always circumscribed her horizons as if at her pleasure.

If we leave aside certain hits, repeated over and over again and with an ill grace, at the people she has taken a dislike to (at a certain lady of the *seven little chairs*, for example, who was continually reappearing as her butt and victim), the feuilleton created by Mme de Girardin, in 1836, under the title of *Courrier de Paris*, was piquant, light, gay, paradoxical, and not always wrong. In reading her we must as a rule not bear too heavily upon her. Her observation of Parisian society is skin-deep; she seizes upon the absurdities, the whims of a season or a single day, of a single class that calls itself elegant *par excellence*. A horse race, a hunt, a new fashion, a frivolous thing taken seriously, a serious thing taken frivolously, those are her ordinary and easy subjects and triumphs. She arrives, she steps into her subject as into a drawing-room, having made up her mind beforehand to be gay, amiable, dazzling, the reverse of commonplace (I do not say of common sense), and she keeps her wager. A few felicitous, unexpected, altogether droll words make you forget the want of substance; she is facetious. You laugh, you are put out (but you forget in a moment) by the ingenuities and the sallies of detail, often a complete mockery or mystification of human nature. Black and white, the true and the false, she reverses all that, and it would be real pedantry to take her too seriously. The authoress writes these light little feuilletons in the neatest of styles, and composes them with a perfect art: imagination also mingles with them. What a mad idea, for example, what an amusing invention, to suppose the poor stag, in her description of a hunt at Chantilly, to have had the good taste, in its flight, to cross the most picturesque valleys, the most celebrated spots. 'It crossed the whole park of Ermenonville, she says; it saluted in passing, *rapidly, it is true*, the tomb of Jean-Jacques, that mortal who, like itself, always thought he was pursued . . . After a run of six hours,

the ingenious victim (*do you observe the curious expression ?*) dropped into the beautiful pool of Mortfontaine ; it chose the most poetic spot to die in. If we were a believer in metempsychosis, we should say that the soul of some landscape painter, unhappy in love, had passed into the body of this noble stag, such artistic taste did it show in all its promenades and even in its fall . . . ' All this is carried a little far, it is perhaps a little forced à la Marivaux ; the narrator is amused and overdoes it : she clings to her pretty idea, and, once in the swing, she does not let it go. This kind of thing is amusing however, especially if it is told rather than written, if it is read once and no more. On certain days, the moralist in Mme de Girardin lights on the truth, and she could be deep if she pleased. In this semi-serious style I know of no more pleasing feuilleton than that of the 29 March 1840. Mlle Rachel had appeared at the Chamber of Deputies, then at a ball given by a Minister, and had been received with every token of respect. Mme de Girardin asks herself : ' Is this great respect shown by the world of Paris to Mlle Rachel, accorded to her talent . . . ? to her character ? . . . ' She concludes that it is accorded especially to her *rank*. You are astonished ! The fact is that there are two kinds of rank, the *social* rank, and the *native* or *natural* rank : ' Not only, she says, does nature allot us a rank, but this rank is a vocation. There are some very great dames who were born *actresses*, and who never played on any stage '. And she develops this idea in all its various and fanciful contrasts, as you may imagine. There are very great ladies who were born to inhabit a *porter's* lodge ; there are others who were born *gendarmes*, *colonels*, anything you please. She continues to amuse herself with the idea, and she is not so far wrong, it seems to me. And the men, there are some who were born *troubadours*, others *knights*, others *jesters*, a few who were born *grands seigneurs*. When the social condition and the natural rank meet, all is well, we have harmony. ' There are, she says again, men who are born *monks*, who are bald at twenty-five, who spend their days in examining old books, and who will transform any bachelor's lodging into a cell '. Thus feuilleton has always remained in my memory as a little masterpiece of the kind. It ought to bear as its inscription these lines of *Bérénice*.

En quelque obscurité que le sort l'eût fait naître,  
Le monde, en le voyant, eût reconnu son maître.

In Mme de Girardin's novels we may meet with the same kind of wit as in her feuilletons, portraits and society scenes, delicate observations, a goodly number of paradoxes, a little exaggeration, little emotion, little action, great knowledge of the fashionable world, the art and even the craft of elegance. Of all her novels, (if my memory serves me) that which appeared to me to show off the qualities of the authoress to most advantage, is *Le Lorgnon*.

It is time to say it, Mme de Girardin as a woman, and when she shows herself in person, appears much superior, hitherto, to what she has been as an authoress. Of wit, properly speaking nobody could have more than she. At a soirée, at a dinner-party, at a club, nobody could be more lively, more amusing, more inexhaustible in piquant mots and sparks of wit. Of ease, of self-possession, of dexterity, of attack and repartee, nobody could in charity desire any more. If, at the beginning of a conversation, she appears to have brought with her a few premeditated pleasantries, which form part as it were of her day's outfit, she has others which come out unexpectedly at every instant, and these are not the least good. We feel that she is herself amused at what she says and hears, if what she hears is at all witty. She plays an honest game, and her wit has a hearty ring. I do not know if she has any enemies, enemies that she hates at least, but I believe if she met any of them at dinner, if she listened to them with pleasure, and if their replies were not too foolish, she would cease to hate them. Her good qualities then spring from her nature, from the source, and when we see her we can still understand the praise which was unanimously accorded her by those who saw much of her in her first form of Delphine, 'that, knowing as she did her natural advantages, she did not abuse them to tease the men, or to crush the women'. With pen in hand, she is not always thus.

For those who, like us, have a mania for seeking something else and something better than we are offered, it remains to be regretted that the intellect, in Mme de Girardin, brilliant though it may be, should long have assumed

so absolute a predominance over all the other parts which compose the soul of talent, and that she should have perfected herself as a writer in a direction which is not precisely that of seriousness and truth. Being what she is, the society, the poetry and the journalism of the present day would be lacking in some essential point, and the three together would not have said their last word, if they had not combined to produce this singular, strange, elegant compound, which, in its clever and precise form, trifling with the matter, associates naturalness and a remnant of *naïveté* with malice and gaiety, the woman of intellect, the fashionable cavalier, the consummate writer, and sometimes still the amazon and the Muse.

Mme Émile de Girardin died on June 29, 1855. Her loss was keenly felt. *La Joie fait peur*, a pretty comedy, played at the Théâtre-Français, in which, from beginning to end, laughter shines through tears, was her last farewell to the public. She was a woman of much wit. That is what we begin to say more than ever after having lost her.

## DAGUESSEAU<sup>1</sup>

*Monday, February 24, 1851.*

THIS History, which is in its second edition, and whose author, M. Boullée, once made a distinguished first appearance as Public Prosecutor, is worthy of its subject and gives us a faithful idea of Daguesseau's fine and noble personality. The author has not neglected to extract any instructive lessons bearing upon justice and the judge's office that such a life may contain. The weaknesses of which the illustrious Chancellor more than once gave evidence after entering upon the political career, are not disguised. That timidity and vacillation in politics is not rare in great lawyers, who only recover all their strength and authority on the bench and under external guarantees which leave their judgment all its balance. But even the weaknesses of a Daguesseau are subject to principles and have their limits; they are founded on scruples, and they deserve our respect. Let us see therefore if we can profit, in our study, by M. Boullée's estimable work; let us see if there is not something to add, something to deduct perhaps from what he says of the literary Daguesseau, and whether we cannot also complete the general idea of the man with a few essential features which his biographer has judged to be incompatible with his character as a whole, and which, in my opinion, are not so. One can only profit and win honour by approaching, even with every freedom of investigation and criticism, such a person as Daguesseau.

Daguesseau was born in 1668 at Limoges, where his father was Intendant at the time, a venerable father of whom he has left us a biography; and he received from him a strong and affectionate home education, which was responded to by the happiest and most docile nature.

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire du Chancelier Daguesseau*, by M. Boullée (1848).

From his early childhood the young Daguesseau learned everything, he continued to learn all his life, and we should be rather puzzled to say what branch of knowledge, what language and what literature he did not know. A mother one day asked Fontenelle to recommend a tutor for her son, but her requirements were that this tutor should be a scholar, learned in every matter, an antiquary, a physicist, a metaphysician, in short that he should know everything, and a little more besides. After a little reflection Fontenelle replied : ' Madame, the more I think over it, the more it appears to me that the only man who is capable of being tutor to Monsieur your son is Monsieur the Chancellor Daguesseau '. Such was Daguesseau as he appears at an early age, almost from childhood. At the same time, the clearness and correctness of the methods employed permitted of all this knowledge entering with ease and disposing itself with orderliness in this young, this noble and solid intellect. His father, the most pacific, the most prudent of men, and the least fond of innovations, was yet attached, by affinities of virtue and conduct as well as of thought, to that school which was then designated by the name of Port-Royal, and his son became under his supervision a kind of external and free, and quite literary, pupil of that school, at least by reason of the methods he was made to follow, and of the general spirit that presided over his education. The whole was carried on orally as far as possible, in such a way that the boy's attention was constantly kept on the alert. Not a moment was wasted, and even the travels of the Intendant provided varied occasions for exercises and lessons: M. Daguesseau took his children with him, and his travelling carriage became a sort of schoolroom, where strict and regular study was pleasingly mingled with conversation. ' After the prayer of the travellers, with which my mother, Daguesseau tells us, always began the day's progress, we could construe the Greek and Latin authors which were the subject of our study at the time . . . ' Greek, Latin, and later Hebrew, English, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, mathematics, physics, and above all belles-lettres (not to speak of jurisprudence which was his proper sphere), the young Daguesseau learned everything, and, gifted as he was with the most capacious memory, he retained everything: ". . . The wonderful Advocate-General Daguesseau



who knows all my songs, and who remembers them as if he had nothing else to do,' wrote M. de Coulanges to Mme de Sévigné about him. There is a story that Boileau having once read to him some epistle or satire he had just composed, Daguesseau said calmly that he knew it already, and as a proof began to recite the whole of it. Boileau was astonished and almost angry; then, when he saw that it was only a prodigious feat of memory, he was full of admiration. Can we now be surprised that, in the midst of such perpetual discipline and under such an accumulated layer of the most varied acquirements, nature should have been, if not kept under, at least covered over, and that originality never shows from underneath the extreme culture in Daguesseau?

I will say at once that the only original and quite individual qualities that he possesses as a writer, are what the ancients called *mores*, that indescribable quality not only of meekness and placidity (*mite ac placidum*), but of prepossessingness and humanity (*Blandum et humanum*), that discreetly amiable and slowly persuasive something which rises and exhales from a pure soul, and which, penetrating all his words, insensibly reaches the souls of others.

Daguesseau offers us with more distinction and elegance what Rollin possesses, the style of a good and well-bred man, which, if you are not repelled by an occasional and apparent commonplace, by an occasional slowness of thought and phrase, repays you in the end for your patience with a certain moral effect to which you were not accustomed. We see appearing and shining, after a few pages of continuous reading, a picture of the private life, the domestic virtues, the piety and the modesty of the writer, of what one of his granddaughters so excellently called his *inner charms*. Such is, in the good passages, the literary and moral merit of Daguesseau.

In his youth he had one passion, and he had but one, belles-lettres. One should see, in the *Instructions* which in his turn he later addressed to his son, with what affection and tenderness he approaches this interesting chapter. He only places it after the study of history, after that of jurisprudence and religion; we feel that he needed some courage to put off the moment of speaking of this study which to him was the most attractive and the dearest.

'In passing to this subject, he says, I seem to be touched by the same feeling as a traveller who, after being long satiated by the sight of divers countries, where he has often found things even more beautiful and more worthy of his curiosity, than in the place of his birth, nevertheless relishes a secret pleasure on arriving in his own country, and esteems himself happy to be able at length to breathe his native air. One loves to see again the places where one has dwelt in one's childhood . . . I think that I have in some way become younger ; I think I see rising up again those precious days, those irrecoverable days of my youth . . .'

One is rather at a loss in having to quote from Daguesseau, for there is nothing either particularly original, or very animated, or very new, and one is obliged to wait and to continue one's reading until that *affection* of which I spoke begins to operate ; but then the charm makes itself felt, an honest and certain and wholesome charm. What shall I say ? when there is not a too evident display of rhetoric, there is earnestness in him, and the impression one receives is as it were sweet to the touch of the mind.

A charming word which expresses so well that passion of Daguesseau for letters, is that which he said one day to the scholar Boivin with whom he was reading I know not what Greek poem : ' Let us make haste, he exclaimed ; supposing we were to die before finishing it ! ' This anecdote reminds me of another which is told of a man who left a vivid memory with those who knew him, the Abbé Mablini, the most exquisite and the most attic of the masters that our Normal School has ever possessed. The Venus of Milo had just arrived from Greece ; it was at the Louvre, and M. Mablini one morning left the Sorbonne to go to see it. But suddenly this man who was so enamoured of antique beauty began to run down the Rue de la Harpe, to arrive the quicker, and for fear lest some unforeseen accident should in the meanwhile rob him of the masterpiece. He said to himself like Daguesseau : *Supposing we should die before seeing it !* That is passion, which gives wings. Daguesseau never had any wings or true passion except in this matter of belles-lettres.

In his younger years he saw much of Racine and Despréaux ; he merited an honourable place in the latter's poetry ; he would sometimes give the aging poet, who read,

his lines to him, the counsels of a somewhat timid prose-writer, to which Boileau did not lend ear. From the beginning Daguesseau carried his timid scruples into good taste as into everything else. Having come upon the scene towards the end of the reign of Louis XIV, he was fully exposed to the heat and the rays of the great century at its setting. His talent, like a fruit of the late autumn, was born quite ripe in a sense, and never at any moment had that first verdure which, by mellowing, afterwards improves the savour and the perfume.

Borne by his merits, and by the authority which the paternal rectitude conferred upon him, to the office of Advocate-General at twenty-two, he caused a revolution in the Palais de Justice, as his biographers say, by the novel character of his eloquence. Let us speak frankly: all these eulogics which are bestowed upon Daguesseau's forensic eloquence appear to us very exaggerated to-day. One is astonished on reading his *Plaidoyers* and his *Mercuriales*, to learn that they caused a *complete revolution* anywhere. To account for this effect, even whilst reducing it to its proper value, it must be remembered that the Parliament, at that date as always, was a little behind the rest of the century; so, on his appearing there with his kindly mien, his gravity tempered by affability and adorned by politeness, his easy, harmonious and slightly florid diction, his somewhat studied neatness, the polished and elegant disciple of Despréaux produced a kind of relative revolution; he had the merit of introducing and naturalizing at the Parquet what already prevailed everywhere else; and he, of all young men the least given to innovations, entered the career so apropos, that his first step formed an epoch.

When we read to-day in his last biographer the extracts which are given as specimens of his best eloquence, when we read in the works themselves of the author those so highly lauded *Mercuriales*, we can see little in them but the exercise of a distinguished talent that is able to make a skilful use of a happy rhetoric. He there speaks of nothing but *senators*, *patrician families*, the *purple*, the *images of ancestors*; it is the Roman superstition in its completeness; it is Latin as employed by Cicero and Livy, reduced and adapted to parliamentary customs and pretensions. When he makes use of all these grand

words, the magisterial gravity of the young man does not permit itself a smile, which is quite natural ; but neither does it appear to suspect the smile that it might raise outside. In general, there is a multitude of already imminent or existing things of which Daguesseau appears to have no inkling in his honourable innocence. For example, I nowhere find any mention of Voltaire in his works, nor can I find that he once mentioned Molière. Molière and Voltaire, with all that those two names represent, appear to have been unknown and non-existent as far as he was concerned.

Advocate-General at twenty-two, as I have said, and Attorney-General at thirty-two, Daguesseau had to decide in ecclesiastical matters which occupied only too much attention at this end of the reign of Louis XIV. In a very fine Memorandum of his, which contains some very well-touched historical portraits, he has set forth his conduct and his views. From the beginning we see him anxious not to go to any extreme ; he is opposed to the excesses of Jansenism, but he is no less energetically opposed to the dangers, which he thought he saw in the direction of ultramontane power. In 1715 Daguesseau even had an almost heroic moment, which later, when he had cooled and weakened, was often recalled as a reproach to his conduct at the time. It concerned the famous bull *Unigenitus*, which the King desired the Parliament to register, and to see accepted without restriction by the whole kingdom. The Chancellor Voysin (who was at the same time Secretary of State for War) had drawn up, to that end, a precise and rigid declaration, which he intended to impose upon Parliament : but Daguesseau, as Attorney-General, *who had at that time*, as Voltaire says, *the intellectual courage that youth gives*,<sup>1</sup> absolutely refused to undertake it. At Court they said quite openly of him : ' Monsieur le Procureur-général is *rebellious* '. Summoned one day to Marly with the other members of the Parquet, he thought that the storm was at length about to break over his head, and that it was very possible that he might sleep that night at the Bastille. His wife (*née d'Ormesson*), worthy of him, acted on that day like a Roman matron, and, embracing her husband at his departure, she exhorted

<sup>1</sup> A relative youth, for he was forty-seven years of age.

him to forget that he had a wife and children, and to think only of his honour and his conscience. The condition of Louis XIV, who was on his death-bed and had but a few days more to live, rendered this heroism a little less dangerous.

Having become Chancellor of France and a Minister in 1717, under the Regency, Daguesseau showed too clearly wherein he was wanting as a politician, and his rectitude, bewildered between Law, Dubois and the Regent, came across more than one snare that it was unable to avoid. Here it is fitting to restore to Saint-Simon all the credit that is due to him as a student of his character. Daguesseau's estimable biographer, M. Boullée, appears to believe that Saint-Simon, in judging the illustrious Chancellor, yielded to I know not what natural and instinctive antipathy against the men of the gown; he disputes the accuracy and the sagacity of the redoubtable moralist who in this, as in many cases, was no more than clear-sighted. For our part, we have long been accustomed to comprehend how Saint-Simon may be a passionate and yet a most truthful and, if we may say so, a most authentic witness. He has a veracity even in his violence, a veracity which, in a sense, does not depend upon himself. Here, however, in what concerns Daguesseau, Saint-Simon is by no means violent; he pays every kind of tribute to the great lawyer. 'Much intelligence, application and penetration, he says, much knowledge of every kind, much gravity and judicial dignity, equity, piety and innocence of conduct, formed the groundwork of his character. . . . Withal mild, good, humane, easy of access and agreeable, and, in private, full of gaiety and seasoned pleasantries, that never wounds anybody; extremely sober, polished without pride, and noble without the least avarice, naturally indolent, resulting in a slowness'. This *indolence* needs explaining when the word is applied to a man who is as constantly and diversely laborious as Daguesseau was; but I think we must take it in the sense of *slowness* of temperament, absence of verve and lengthiness of phrase, which is incontestable when we read Daguesseau; we feel that he must have spent much time in filing and polishing what still appears to drag a little in the reading, and that he amused himself besides with

many studies of inclination and fancy which may have resembled indolence in the eyes of active and busy men. After these first eulogies, Saint-Simon asks himself how a magistrate adorned with so many virtues and talents, who had been such an admirable Advocate-General, such a perfect Attorney-General, and who would doubtless have made a *sublime First President*, should have turned out so weak and incompetent a Chancellor and Minister. He gives a first reason of this : namely, that Daguesseau is a parliamentarian to excess, to the point of superstition, that he was brought up, as was also said of him by Cardinal Fleury, in the *fear of God and Parliaments*. Another very shrewd and judicious reason, which goes to the bottom of his character, is that, in his long experience of the Parquet, Daguesseau, a man of broad and lucid mind, had accustomed himself to gather, to examine, to weigh and compare in all thoroughness the reasons of the two parties, 'in displaying, says Saint-Simon, this kind of *balance-sheet* before the judges with all the graces and flowers of eloquence,' and besides, according to the desired recommendation, 'with so much art and exactness, that nothing might be forgotten on either side, and that none of the numerous auditors might augur what was the Advocate-General's opinion, before he had begun his conclusion'. That was reputed the perfection of the trade. Now, this kind of detailed and alternate summing-up and continual weighing of evidence which the Advocate-General practised in speaking, and the Attorney-General also practised in writing, had given to Daguesseau's mind its definitive form ; and as this was added to great conscientiousness and little natural decision of character, he had great difficulty in making up his mind on any question, in resolutely grasping that sword of the mind which should always accompany the correct scales to cut short in good time what would otherwise run a risk of being endless. Saint-Simon quotes the most curious examples of this indecision of a mind so vast, which continued to the last moment. The Marquis d'Argenson, in his excellent Memoirs, says the same thing, and with some piquant and novel details, that the Chancellor, for example, was sometimes reduced, in his irresolution, to appeal to one of his children to assist him in making up his mind. The Cardinal de Fleury, in his Despatches, judged Daguesseau

no differently when he wrote : ' M. le Chancelier is certainly very able, and has great lights ; but, by reason of his great lights, he discovers difficulties in everything '.

Why is a great judge not necessarily a good politician ? Why is he so often the contrary ? The eminent example of Daguesseau offers perhaps the most singular and the most striking case that could be produced of this kind of difference and almost incompatibility between the two talents. But, to study thoroughly so great an example and to extract from it all the lessons it contains, we must presume to introduce into the idea of Daguesseau's character all the true elements as they are given by the most clear-sighted and sagacious witnesses.

Less by reason of the perplexities that were encountered in his class of mind than of the inconvenience caused by his rectitude, Daguesseau was twice banished to his estate of Fresnes. His first banishment lasted two years and a half (1718-1720), the second lasted no less than five and a half years (1722-1727). It was during this happy retreat that, given up to his natural inclinations, he appears to us with all his pleasing, temperate, ingenious qualities, and to greatest advantage. Do not expect to find in him the statesman who suffers or who laments at least the good he might have done. Submissive, resigned and freed as it were, Daguesseau enjoys his own company in peace, he converses with his own thoughts and at the most discusses them with a few friends. If, at the beginning, he happens to treat of some political and economic subject on the order of the day, he does so only for conscience' sake and as a sort of pastime, and with a quite Christian grace he compares this useless labour with those *baskets* that the recluses of the Thebaid used to weave to occupy their leisure hours, and which they often threw into the fire at the end of the week, when they found that they had no use for them. Thus he appears to us in his cheerful mood from the beginning of his banishment. The correspondence which he entertains during these years, and the works he composed, give us a picture of him in all the truth of his moral and literary nature.

One of his most ordinary correspondents was M. de Valincour, that erstwhile friend of Boileau and Racine, a lover of all branches of knowledge and all literatures, a delicate mind, rather singular, and extremely religious,

who, by reason of the severe attitude he took up with regard to metaphysics (with which he was thoroughly conversant), often forced Daguesseau to take up its defence. Where Daguesseau appears to me superior and almost original by reason of the combination and the moderation he brings to bear upon it, is in his philosophic considerations, from which he never separates morality and religion. Daguesseau is for human reason, and in all things he gives it its just due. He is equally for moral liberty, for the liberty of investigation, and he loves to exercise it on his own account and takes a pleasure in doing so within a circle traced beforehand. M. de Valincour, in his discussions with Daguesseau, had much of Pascal's method, who despised reason, drove it into a corner, and disputed its power of finding by itself the beginning and the outline of great truths. Daguesseau, a great reader of Plato and nourished on the ancient authors, thinks that there is no need to ascribe to pagan philosophy more imperfections than it really has: 'True religion, he says, has no need to suppose in its adversaries or rivals any faults that they do not possess'. The Gospel will ever be outside the sphere of comparison: let us leave to purely human morality the portion that is its lawful due. Why play into the hands of Hobbes or the Pyrrhonians, those enemies of the first natural truths? must we employ religion to attack ideas *which are at least its preliminary*? For, according to him, 'religion is, in its moral precepts, no more than the perfection of reason', and the rash blows which one deals at the one fall back upon the other. Daguesseau explains very ingeniously how one meets with intelligent men who hate reason (he calls them, after Plato, *misologues*), just as we meet with others who are *misanthropists* and hate men. Those who thus hate their fellow-creatures are generally the same who at first loved them most and cultivated their society, and who found in their intercourse only bitterness and disgust. It is the same with the sciences. 'A man of intellect, he says, desires to read and to know everything; for a long time he finds therein endless pleasure: but after much reading, the more light he gains, the more does he reflect, and his reflections corrupt, so to say, and poison all the sweetness of knowledge'. And this man goes to an opposite extreme, and in his anger



begins to condemn all branches of knowledge at one sweep, just as the misanthropist condemns all men. These thoughts are as just and temperate as can be ; they show Daguesseau at his best. They are intelligent and acute, with a slightly Socratic reminiscence. He brings to these matters all the qualities of his temperament and his intellect, which elsewhere would be faults. He examines everything, he allows nothing to escape : ' You recognise by these doubts, he says somewhere in a self-confession, the character of an *over-scrupulous* mind which, in trying to grasp its object with too much evidence, often goes beyond the mark '. There we find, and on his own admission, the man who *splits hairs*, and whom Saint-Simon calls the *father of difficulties*. On every question of philosophy he sums up and weighs at great length and with evident satisfaction, all the reasons on both sides ; he even enters into the adversary's ideas, in order the better to correct them and set them right. Whatever the subject of discussion, he honours, he accepts and believes religion, without ever thinking of discussing its foundations, and, on the other hand, he supports and vindicates metaphysics and the right of speculative research within just limits. With Daguesseau we are far from Pascal's method ; it is rather Nicole's method, and still very mitigated : or better, it is the method of the sage English apologist Doctor Clarke, which, in his *Méditations métaphysiques*, he desires to develop still more and to place in a better light.

Daguesseau is a Christian who often reads Plato : he is a disciple of Descartes, but one who reads the Holy Scriptures every day.

The ten *Méditations sur les vraies et les fausses Idées de la Justice* are fine reading. Daguesseau, with Plato, with Cicero, believes in a certain natural idea of justice, which is neither interest nor utility, but the right ; he believes, independently of positive revelation, in the triumph of this idea in the laws of the great law-givers and the great nations, in the *conscience of the human race*. He combats Hobbes, he combats in advance Bentham, he refutes his Jansenist friend M. de Valincour, who denied human reason, without grace, that power of justice. He walks, he rises up with breadth, on the way opened out by the great jurisconsult Domat. We get more than a glimpse, we already get a very clear grasp, in these noble pages

of Daguesseau, of the theory of more than one illustrious modern, of what was afterwards the metaphysics of M. Royer-Collard, of the Duc de Broglie's ideas on legislation, or again of those lofty ideas of primordial justice which the elder Portalis bequeathed to his son. Christianity adds and confirms: but, anteriorly to Christianity, according to them, there is a real and broad basis for law in the human mind. The Treatise *De Officiis* is possible before the Gospel: only it is perfected afterwards, it is more and more humanized and becomes divine.

It is interesting to see how Daguesseau, by his efforts moderated by reason, and whilst looking to the ancients alone for authority, already inclines more than he thinks towards the future.

In the *Instructions*, which contain a general plan of studies for the use of his son, and which are dated from Fresnes, but before the time of his banishments, we gain a complete idea of Daguesseau with all his tastes, his principles and his literary judgments, which are regularly set forth. In one place he takes himself to task rather sharply for not having studied history as much as he should have done; in spite of the important offices which were so early laid upon him, he might truly still have done so: 'But, on the one hand, the charms of belles-lettres which have been for me, he says, a *kind of intellectual debauch*, and, on the other, a taste for philosophy and the sciences of reasoning, have with me often usurped an unjust preference . . . ' However, he tells us very pleasantly how he very nearly sank hopelessly in the opinion of Father Malebranche, who had conceived a good opinion of him from some conversations on metaphysics; but this father one day caught him with a Thucydides in his hand, *not without a sort of philosophical shock*. 'Avoid, my dear son, exclaims Daguesseau, falling into the same error (the neglect of history), and flee as you would the song of the Sirens the seductive discourses of these abstract philosophers, etc., etc. . . . ' We see already from this tone the literary, florid and Ciceronian taste of Daguesseau.

In literature proper I will define him as a disciple of Racine, of Boileau and the *Art poétique*, but one who has preserved a complacent habit of periphrasis which Pascal, whom he admired so much, would hardly have pardoned him. His diction was like that of Bourdaloue

very much seasoned with Flûchier. He caresses his sentence, he nurses his rhythm, he sacrifices to harmony. Passionately fond of letters, and unable to give himself up to them exclusively, he speaks of them all the more formally and floridly, as in a cremonious fête. He is an *Academist* in short, though his modesty always stood in the way of his becoming a member of the French Academy. Though not one of those ancient magistrates who rise at four in the morning, dine at ten and sup at six, there was something old-fashioned and out of date, something of the gallantry of the olden times in certain of his graces. When *Madame la Chancelière*, his spouse, is mentioned, or when he addresses to her his poetical tributes, his phrases appear to be drawn up after an obsolete fashion. In the fine letter to M. de Valincour on the burning of a library, in which he quotes Cicero so often, he speaks of *Astrée*, that is to say of Madame la Chancelière herself, who was celebrated under that name by M. de Valincour in some Idyll or other which smacked of the golden age. When he writes to the same M. de Valincour about the younger Racine who is at Fresnes, we see what a solemn idea Daguesseau is ready to form of a poet: 'What do you say of the young poet whom we have had here more than a fortnight, and who has never consented to lend her (Madame la Chancelière) his Muse to reply to you? Perhaps we must commend his prudence therein; but prudence is hardly a poet's virtue; the more I study his character, the more singular he appears to me; to see him, to hear him speak, one would never imagine that such beautiful lines could come out of his head, *adeo ut plerique*, etc.' Always the little tag of Latin quotation, the edge of the Roman toga. Daguesseau still belonged to that race of men who could not have a thought without asking the permission and expression of some ancient. The meaning of the whole letter is really that Racine the younger, who wrote rather fine poetry, did not appear by any means a man of wit.

This Ciceronian taste of the semi-Roman magistrate, this foible of the Chancellor of France who in his banishments at Fresnes imagined himself at Tusculum and saw on all sides consular reflections, is found again, with an artlessness clothed in elegance and inspired by earnestness, in the beautiful and touching Life which Daguesseau

wrote of his father. It is evident that when writing it, he sometimes remembered Tacitus' *Life of Agricola*, but he remembers still more frequently and before all that he is a son and a Christian, and that inspires him. This Biography, at first intended for the family circle alone, has preserved the character of a sweet and saintly home solemnity. Piety, respect, modesty, the most exquisite moral delicacy, are its soul and its characteristics. A dry analysis could give no idea of it. We must go to the son's own pages to learn to love the moderate, continuous and full expression of that fine antique life of M. Daguesseau the father; there we may see shining, under his gradually whitening hair, the invariable rectitude of the old man in all the flower of his first innocence.

'Nature had given him, his son tells us, a delicate and feeling heart, with a passionate blood that was easily set aflame; and, as quickness is not incompatible with the greatest goodness, he might have been very quick-tempered if he had yielded to his nature; but his face alone betrayed, in spite of himself, a quite involuntary emotion. One saw him turn red and silent at the same moment, the superior part of his soul allowing this first flame to pass over without saying a word, immediately restoring calm and tranquillity to the sensitive part, which long habit ever rendered equally docile to the laws of reason and religion'.

The whole web of the language is filled and shaded as it were with these sincere and touching moral distinctions.

I must make a critical remark however on a phrase that has been often quoted, and has caused much surprise, coming from a pen so correct as Daguesseau's. His father had commenced his judicial career by holding the office of Councillor in the Parliament of Metz; but the office of Master of Requests having fallen vacant by the death of a brother, M. Daguesseau applied for and obtained it at the age of twenty-three or twenty-four. He would have preferred, his son tells us, to remain a judge pure and simple, and to pass his days as a Councillor of the Parliament of Paris, and he adds, in terms which recall the Hôtel Rambouillet more subtly than becomed a friend and disciple of Boileau: 'The Masters of Requests are like the desires of the human heart, they aspire to be no more; it is a calling one embraces only to quit it. . .'

Now, this strange phrase about the Masters of Requests, compared with the desires of the heart which *aspire to be no more*, would be inexplicable in a mind of such good quality if it were not that Saint Augustine uses the same words and in fact applies them to the desires of the human heart (*sunt ut non sint*). To this Daguesseau alludes ; he was fond of quoting this phrase of Saint Augustine, and if, as in the present case, he shows a want of taste, he as usual shelters himself behind an ancient and a Father of the Church. Saint Augustine shares with him this literary sin.

We know Daguesseau's faults, and we have been enabled to appreciate his good qualities besides as a writer and a man. Moderation, consideration in all things, a vast and temperate intellect, a sincere and ingenuous desire for conciliation, a prodigious, immense memory, a pure, elegant and careful expression, that affectionate politeness which is born of a fundamental honesty and innocence, these are the qualities that are evidenced by his writings and that one might also read, to a certain point, in the features of his noble and handsome face, in that discreet smile, in that shrewd, benevolent and soft eye, and even in those round and perceptibly softened contours, in which there is no indication of strength. His calm stateliness was the result of a combination of merits and virtues, difficult to define without exceeding those bounds which he observed so well. Moral goodness was predominant in combination with civility and urbanity. He was venerable and amiable to all who approached him. Even his reproofs, we are told, and we can easily imagine it, were more like an outpouring of the heart than a reprimand. We may apply to him what he said of his father, that he had retained to the last *that precious timidity of a virtuous and tender conscience*, which is repugnant to any severe measures and even words.

He had wit in the proper sense, pleasantry and playfulness in conversation. Some pretty lines and some pretty mots of his have been quoted. To a friend who was studying metaphysics on the eve of his marriage, he wrote archly : ' You are perhaps the first man who, on the eve of his marriage, thought only of the spirituality of the soul '. Cardinal Quirini, who paid him a visit at Fresnes, said to him in his library : ' So this is the place

where you forge arms against the Vatican?—'You mean bucklers', replied Daguesseau. The surgeon La Peyronie wanted to see an impassable wall of separation erected between surgery and medicine. 'But on which side of the wall will you place the patient?' asked Daguesseau. His spoken words seem to have been smarter than what he wrote, as is usually the case; in his writings he is subtle and ingenious rather than witty.

Some of the Ordinances which the Chancellor Daguesseau issued in the exercise of his long judicial career have been justly celebrated; it is generally acknowledged at the same time that he was far from realizing all the useful legislation that he conceived, and which might naturally have been expected of his great capacity and his lights. His caution and his humanity equally withstood any kind of decisive reform, which might have profoundly altered the condition of things and persons. He dreaded the responsibility attaching to any innovation. As Chancellor he had the supreme power over the publishing trade, and over the literature which aspired to appear regularly; this directorship, which was a dependency of his office, remained with him until November 1750, not many months before his death. We may imagine that the philosophy of the day came off badly with him, and that it often murmured with impatience and anger at feeling itself thus held in check. Whilst he favoured the publication of purely historical or learned Collections, he refused his license, for example, to Voltaire for his *Éléments de la Philosophie de Newton*. 'This semi-savant and semi-citizen Daguesseau, wrote Voltaire to d'Alembert one day when he felt rancorous, was a tyrant: he tried to prevent the nation from thinking'. It is asserted that the scrupulous Chancellor never gave his license for the printing of any new novel, and that he granted a tacit permission only on express conditions; that he gave the Abbé Prévost permission to publish the first volumes of *Cleveland* only on condition that the hero should in the end turn Catholic. And yet this same Chancellor, captivated by the plan which Diderot unfolded to him, and from pure love of the sciences, ultimately granted his Privilège to the *Encyclopædia*, the first volumes of which, it is true, only appeared after his death. Thus,

without suspecting the fact, he helped to introduce the fatal horse within the walls of Troy.

In spite of these vacillations, these uncertain gropings and weaknesses, and although most of his qualities keep themselves in check, the name of Dagucsseau has been handed down as one of the finest and one of the most revered in the memory of Frenchmen ; years have added rather than taken from that brilliancy and that bloom of renown which, towards the end, all his contemporaries no longer recognized with the same respect. With that somewhat confused and vaguely defined veneration of which the illustrious Chancellor is to-day the object, there mingle, after all some justice ; it is a public tribute paid to that gentle, lasting, unassuming influence, which he exercised all his life, and which, saving a few transitory eclipses, shone with a soft radiance from a mild, virtuous, upright nature. Since it is a necessity of human nature to see glorifying halos in the distance, it is good and praiseworthy that they should sometimes encircle those tranquil countenances which breathe soul rather than genius, and of which the general and transcendent tone is only the expression of conduct itself.

## THE ABBÉ DE CHOISY

*Monday before Lent, March 3, 1851.*

THE Abbé de Choisy loved to disguise himself; in his childhood and his youth he had been accustomed to dress as a girl; the fancy had clung to him, for we are assured that even late in life, at an age when he blushed most at this effeminate mania, he would still shut himself up to dress as a dowager, sighing, alas! that he was no longer able to display himself as a gallant marquise or a shepherdess. Into all the conditions of life in which he successively appeared we see him bring the same spirit of levity, grace and sprightly giddiness. His life resembles one of the most diverse and the least probable of comedies, and with him we can never tell where the disguise ends. A tonsured abbé from his childhood, but particularly devoted to the women's caps and ribbons, coquettish as a nun in *Vert-Vert* and as free with his tongue as a parrot, by turns Comtesse de Sancy in the parish of Saint-Médard and Comtesse des Barres in Le Berry, then a penitent, though still a light-hearted penitent, a kind of Apostle at Siam, a convert and a converter without any melancholy, an agreeable and even a delicate writer, finally an historian of the Church and senior member of the French Academy, his career, which ran through eighty years, forms a complete *mascarade*, and each of his rôles he played naturally and took quite seriously and with sincerity, and at the same time with an air of amusement and playfulness. A pretty creature in his childhood, a very agreeable old man and very much liked in spite of his years, he was never able to repair the faults of his early life or cover the frivolities of his character. Though he had lived to a hundred, he would never have won what we call consideration and authority; but he contrived to merit indulgence and affection, and we may still study him to-day as a curiosity of the great century and a pretty freak of nature.



François-Timoléon de Choisy, Prior of Saint-Lô of Rouen, of Saint-Benoît-du-Sault and of Saint-Gelais, Grand-Dean of the cathedral of Bayeux, etc., etc., was born at Paris in 1644, in one of those great middle-class families who had the privilege of furnishing the old monarchy with its best Secretaries of State and its most hard-working and faithful Councillors and Ministers. His father had spent his life in the exercise of his functions as Intendant and Ambassador, and ended by being Chancellor to Gaston, brother of Louis XIII. His mother, a woman of much intelligence, a *précieuse* in her day (before the word became ridiculous), beautiful, active, intriguing, was a great-granddaughter of the grave and illustrious Chancellor de L'Hôpital. It is curious that an extravagant branch sprung from this antique and venerable stock should have ended in this Abbé de Choisy. Nature, in creating women, sometimes goes astray and produces *viragos* who dream of nothing but manly exercises, tournaments and warlike games. She strayed in the other direction in respect to the Abbé de Choisy, and gave him, together with a pretty face, futile intellectual tastes and an inborn love of the mirror. The Abbé's mother did all she could to cultivate and perpetuate in him this error of nature. He received the most baneful education that one could imagine, an education that was most calculated to assist the development of his feminine and puerile nature; he was brought up in his mother's ruelle. If this idolatrous mother concerned herself, by her conversations and the letters she dictated to him, with fashioning his mind to good language and the politeness of the world of society, she taught him still more effectually to idolize his own little person :

'My mother, he said, had so much weakness for me, that she was continually dressing me up. She was past forty when I was born; and, as she was most anxious to be thought still beautiful, a child of eight or nine whom she took about everywhere made her appear still young. I was dressed as a girl whenever the little Monsieur (brother of Louis XIV) came to the house, and he came at least two or three times a week. My ears were pierced, I wore diamonds and patches, and all the other little knick-knacks that one so easily becomes accustomed to, and which it is very difficult to throw off'.

At the same time that she succeeded, without too much

trouble, in turning her son into a little coquette, she endeavoured to inculcate into him the principles and the art of the *courtier*, and she seems to have reduced the whole moral code to that single point:

'Listen, my son, this degenerate granddaughter of the Chancellor de L'Hôpital would say, do not be proud, and remember that you are only a bourgeois . . . Let me tell you that in France no other aristocracy is recognized but that of the sword . . . Now, my son, in order not to be proud, you must associate with none but people of quality. Go and spend your afternoons with the little de Lesdiguières', the Marquis de Villeroy, the Comte de Guiche, Louvigny; you will accustom yourself early to *complaisance*, and you will all your life retain an air of civility which will make you loved by all the world'.

Those were the precepts of this good mother, which her son ingenuously assures us he greatly profited by, for 'it has come to this, he tells us, that with the exception of my parents, with *whom one must associate in spite of oneself*, I never see a man of the gown. I must spend my life at Court and with my friends, or in my study with my books'. Thus, from principle, he seeks his friends at Court, and nowhere else; the method is a novel one. From love and real attachment, Mme de Choisy could admit of no principle that did not start from the point of view of the courtier and aim solely at influence and fortune. One day, the little Abbé (afterwards Cardinal) de Bouillon, a nephew of Turenne, had a quarrel at school with the Abbé d'Harcourt; it became known. Next day Mme de Choisy asked her son if he had been to pay a visit to the Abbé de Bouillon. 'I told her no, says Choisy, and that the Abbé d'Harcourt was one of my friends. She was ready to eat me: *What!* she said, *M. de Turenne's nephew! Run to him quickly, or leave my house.* She was a masterful woman, who would not be disobeyed and who made my fortune'. Choisy, as we see, cannot hide his admiration for such great wisdom. In this way she lectured him from his childhood and taught him the courtier's code of *honour*. Another recommendation which this virtuous mother often repeated was, that he should not attach himself, definitely, to the princes or members of the royal family, but to the King alone: 'Attach yourself, my son, not to the branches, but to the *trunk of the tree*'. Therein alone lay his salvation. The

Abbé de Choisy was at all times faithful to these articles of his mother's catechism, and we see him to the last a worshipper of the King, a courtier to the point of indiscretion, besides a model of complaisance and civility to all, and a better man at bottom, more faithful to his friends in misfortune than we should have expected from such a discipline.

This misguided mother kept her son beside her almost always dressed as a girl, until he was eighteen years of age. He was twenty-two when she died (1666). In dividing the inheritance with his two brothers, he chose by preference the jewellery, that which glittered; he was as naturally attracted by them as Achilles was by arms. 'We were all three satisfied, he says; I was delighted to have some fine stones; I had never had anything better than ear-rings worth two hundred pistoles and a few rings, instead of which I now saw myself in possession of ear-pendants worth ten thousand francs, a cross of diamonds worth five thousand francs, and three fine rings: that was something to show off and to *play the belle* with'. And indeed, during the following years, the Abbé de Choisy, left to his own resources, and free from all restraint, *played the belle* to his heart's content, and foolishly indulged all his odd tastes. You remember the charming scene in the *Mariage de Figaro*, where Chérubin, at the feet of the Countess, is submitting to be dressed by the sprightly Suzanne, who is arranging his collar: 'Just look at the brat, how pretty he looks as a girl! I am quite jealous of him. How dare you be so pretty?' The little Abbé de Choisy at his mother's side had many times been the object of similar compliments, and the situation remained in his imagination as the most fascinating and desirable. He would have liked that moment to last for ever, and he prolonged it, and renewed it in life as often as he could. One day when Mme de La Fayette met him in an accoutrement which appertained to both sexes, masculine dress with ear-rings and patches, that woman of wit and reason said to him, no doubt in jest and to make him ashamed of himself, that that was not the fashion for men, and that he had better dress entirely as a woman. Passions do not wait to be told a second time what pleases them. The Abbé de Choisy took Mme de La Fayette's irony seriously, and *upon so great an authority*, as he says,

he adopted the complete attire, head-dress and all. One should hear him describe his toilets and adornments with all their details ; he delights in these descriptions, he draws them out and excels in them. That is the most salient, the most original feature of this vain and futile nature, and it shows how natural this feminine coquetry was to him. Disguise has often been the means of promoting licentiousness and disorderly conduct, and of serving the passions and intrigues ; that is most ordinarily the case. With the Abbé de Choisy, who was certainly not free from culpable and disorderly conduct, the disguise seems however to have been the main thing, the strongest attraction ; he loves the mirror for the mirror, dress for its own sake, trifles for trifles' sake. To sit before a glass, to look pretty and to deck himself out with patches and becoming curls, surrounded by a circle of admiring and flattering friends, saying to him in every tone : *You are lovely as an angel !* that was his ideal and his supreme happiness.

M. de La Mennais, in a work entitled *Affaires de Rome*, telling of a visit he paid to that city in 1832, described with a few satirical touches, and with more delicacy than we should have expected from so powerful a pen, the character of the Cardinal de Rohan, who was there at the time : 'Extremely frail in constitution and of a feminine delicacy, says M. de La Mennais, he never came to man's age : nature had intended him to grow old in a long childhood ; he had the weakness, the tastes, the little vanities and the innocence of childhood ; so the Romans had sur-named him *il Bambino*. A man like that is always led by others not as worthy as himself . . .' All those who knew the Cardinal de Rohan, or who had merely seen him, know how accurate this description is. I prefer it as an example, because, as M. de La Mennais remarked, it is an *innocent* example, and in this case the coquetry was not combined with any bad morals. But this feminine coquetry for dress which I have remarked in the Abbé de Choisy was shared by the Cardinal de Rohan in the highest degree, and a rich set of lace worn with grace was for him an object of satisfaction and triumph. He would spend a long time before his glass trying it on, and he had the weakness to remember it even when ascending the steps of the altar. I can still see him at Besançon,

at the commencement of a pontifical ceremony, in all the splendour of his dress and ornaments, casting a smiling and coquettish side-glance on his way, because he had been told that the ceremony was to be witnessed by several ladies who had arrived from Paris the previous evening.

Here the comparison ends. The Abbé de Choisy carried matters much farther, and I have no intention of following him through all the incredible episodes of his youth. For such things to have been permitted, the police administration must have been very lax at the time, and the authorities very lenient. We need never complain of the morals of our own time, when we read the account of things that were not absolutely forbidden the Abbé de Choisy. For months or years he was able to settle in the Faubourg Saint-Marceau, to take a house and keep a carriage, to have his pew in the parish church, to follow the services with honour, to be even requested on an occasion of ceremony to *take round the collecting bag*, and all this under the dress and name of the *Comtesse de Sancy*, although his identity was strongly suspected. Only at the last extremity was he admonished by the superior ecclesiastical authorities. After this, warned though he was, he still persisted in retaining his favourite attire, and even in displaying it in society and the theatre. One day, at the Opera, he was sitting in the box of the young Dauphin, son of Louis XIV, when M. de Montausier entered. 'I was at the height of my joy, he says, when *Kill-joy* came in'. The Chancellor de L'Hôpital himself on seeing his unworthy descendant in this situation, could not have felt more contempt. 'Madame or Mademoiselle, for I do not know what to call you, said M. de Montausier with an ironical salute, I admit that you are beautiful, but are you not in truth ashamed of that dress and of playing the woman, since you are fortunate enough not to be one? Go, go and hide yourself: Monsieur the Dauphin strongly disapproves of you in that attire'. The latter point was not correct; the little Dauphin was, on the contrary, not at all scandalized. The Abbé de Choisy, very much astonished at what he calls M. de Montausier's *bizarrie*, but more keenly sensible to a royal disapproval or anything approaching to it, than to anything else, thereupon thought it well to eclipse himself, and for two or three years he lived incognito in a country-

house in Le Berry which he bought for the purpose, going by the name of the *Comtesse des Barres*, acting, dressing and undressing, arranging his hair and admiring himself in the glass all day, surrounded by the nobility and gentry of the district, *curés*, intendants, bishops, *Mme la lieutenant-générale*, all honest people who raved about him as an elegant Parisienne, and secretly behaving in such a way, that in any other period he might have had to do with the King's Proctor for seduction of girls under age. When old and supposed to be converted, the Abbé de Choisy would still take an unspeakable pleasure in relating these adventures of his youth to his serious friends, such as d'Argenson, who listened with astonishment, or even to philosophic ladies like Mme de Lambert, who would question him indulgently.

He carried on this shameful life as long as he possibly could, and was not much less than thirty-three years of age when he left it off. He had never grown a beard, having early got rid of it by means of I know not what preparation, but his beauty and his face were gone. One passion drives out another, as they say. He travelled in Italy, and became a gambler. He ruined himself and ran into debt, and seriously longed to return to his previous life, for 'ridicule, he thought, is preferable to poverty'. The poor man, in short, who had some wit and many amiable qualities, was more than on the road to make himself for ever ridiculous and contemptible in the eyes of society, when he began to entertain serious reflections, which were assisted by a serious illness. On the 3 August 1683, he fell ill at the Place-Royale, where he was living at the time. He saw death at hand, and heard the physicians say of him: 'He cannot live two hours longer'. The picture of his past life appeared to him in its true light; the near approach of God's judgments threw him into a panic. He recovered, and left his bed of sickness only to enter the Seminary of Foreign Missions, and from the Seminary he went to the Indies as a kind of apostle.

The Abbé de Choisy related the circumstances and the grounds of his conversion in four *Dialogues on the Immortality of the Soul, the Existence of God, Providence, and Religion*, which he published in the following year (1684): he did not lose any time. It is the nature of the Abbé de Choisy that, in all things, he is unable to contain himself,

and, in good as well as evil, he is quick, natural and easily indiscreet. These Dialogues are not entirely by him; they are the outcome of some serious conversations he had with one of his friends, the Abbé de Dangeau, a distinguished and estimable man, as precise a metaphysician as it is possible to be, a philosophic grammarian, who, from this time, assumed a most salutary ascendancy over the Abbé de Choisy. Dangeau even thought that his friend, who started from a certain thoughtless incredulity, went to work too quickly, that with the vivacity of his imagination he passed too quickly over the intermediary stages, always going too far or not far enough. Let me see that there is a God *as clearly as I see that there is daylight*, *Timoléon* (Choisy) of the Dialogues asked *Théophile* (Dangeau). 'As soon as I am persuaded of the power and goodness of God, I shall find nothing difficult to believe'. — 'Then I need only prove to you, replied *Théophile*, that there is a God and that your soul is immortal, and you will be a friar'. And Dangeau said again, speaking of the Abbé's easy and somewhat frail conversion, on which he was being complimented: 'Alas! I had hardly proved the existence of God to this giddy-pate, when I saw he was quite prepared to believe in the baptism of bells'.

The Abbé's conversion however offers some pleasing and sincere features, and we need only refer to the *Journal* which he kept of his Voyage to Siam, and which he published soon after. About 1684, an embassy had arrived from Siam: to Louis XIV, and the conclusion arrived at after the visit of this embassy was, that in order to convert the King of Siam and his subjects to Christianity, it would be enough to send an ambassador and a few missionaries to that country. The Abbé de Choisy heard in the Seminary, in which he was at the time, of this plan of sending a mission to Siam: immediately the palm of Saint François-Xavier shone before his eyes, and, with the zeal of a neophyte, he thought it would be a fine thing to begin his evangelizing labours in that distant kingdom. He was only tonsured, it is true, and not yet ordained a priest. But what did it matter! he would hold his retreat on the voyage, and be ordained after disembarking. He hastened to M. de Seignelay, the Minister of Marine, to solicit the apostolic embassy; the post had been already given to a naval officer, the Chevalier de

Chaumont, a religious and virtuous man ; Choisy could obtain nothing better than the *coadjutorerie* of the embassy, a fanciful name which seemed expressly made for him. This coadjutor of a new kind embarked then at Brest, on the 3 March, 1685, the happiest and most joyful of men, obeying his curiosities and his inconstancies, fleeing from his creditors perhaps, and thinking he was following a ray of Grace. We have the pleasing account of his voyage and his various impressions day by day ; he addressed it to that same friend who had converted him the year before, the Abbé de Dangcau. The Abbé de Choisy was the forty-one years of age.

In this *Journal* there is a little too much about winds and soundings ; but the letters in which the author speaks of himself are entertaining and most natural. The Abbé de Choisy is the most amiable and accommodating of travellers, never bored, never repenting for a moment, seeing the best side of everything. He is in the company of missionaries and Jesuits, some of whom are great mathematicians : he takes advantage of this fact for his instruction. Hardly recovered from sea-sickness, he learns Portuguese and astronomy ; he talks marine affairs, he chatters of latitude and longitude. On the first days he has learned all the customary terms on board. ' I must get accustomed to them, he writes ; I say to my valet de chambre : *Lash my collar* '. Sermons are preached, and he thinks everybody eloquent : ' There is not a cabin-boy on our ship who does not want to go to Paradise : on this supposition, how is it possible for the sermons not to be good ? '—' Oh ! how easily everything bears us to God, he exclaims again with much and sincere feeling, when we are in the midst of the sea, with five or six planks beneath us, always between life and death ! How touching are our reflections when opportunities for doing ill are so distant . . . ! For my own part, I do not think that there can be a better seminary than a ship '. On days of calm, when the sea appears to him ' like a large pond curled by the zephyrs ', they dance on board to pass the time ; there are wrestling-matches between the Breton and the Provençal sailors. The ambassador, assisted by the missionaries, is umpire. They shout *Vive le roi !* Choisy takes care not to forget this fact, for, next to God, and beside God, the King has all the honours : ' His



Majesty is much respected on land, but he is loved at sea', he adds with a sort of tenderness which is not assumed. They hold concerts and sing. The easily-pleased Choisy approves and admires everything. On land he found only one Dangeau, one *Théophile* (as he calls him in his Dialogues); on board he finds half a dozen *Théophiles* :

'I translate Portuguese with Father Visdelou; M. Basset tells me all about the Holy Orders; I look into the moon with Father de Fontenei; I talk about pilotage with our ensign Chammoreau, who knows a great deal about it; and all this in a casual way, without any eagerness, as we pace the deck. And when I want to give myself a treat, I send for M. Manuel, one of our missionaries, who has a very fine voice, and is as good a musician as Lully. You know how I love music; and that is not disapproved of by the Seminary. What is Paradise but an eternal music?'

We begin to understand the nature of this mind, eager, playful, curious, thoughtless, full of charm, that we can easily pardon when once we approach it and know it. His early life has not depraved it as much as we should have expected; it becomes evident that there was more frivolity than licentiousness in his conduct; he remained very natural, very capable of receiving good impressions; he only needed to be surrounded by good examples: he imitates and reflects them. His is one of those natures which are echoes of everything, faithful and varied reflections of their times and their surroundings: excellent witnesses of the current language, whenever their speech is fixed in writing.

The Abbé de Choisy's expression is light and gay, and has some of the charms of childhood. His mind and his pen seemed to have remained at the age of Chérubin. For languages he has the easy memory of a child. From Portuguese he goes, in the twinkling of an eye, to Siamese: he soon masters them, and can talk and chatter in both languages. He is very conscious of his weakness, which is that he does not think much, that he does not sufficiently mature his knowledge: 'I always want to write, and never to read; I confess that that is not the way to be learned. Every man has his weakness. I must scribble, as happy with my pen in my hand, as M. le Prince is with his sword. Happy posterity, if these two implements

were, each in its own sphere, equally well employed !' He is a charming talker, and finds pretty words which sometimes run ahead of his thoughts, but often catch up the fugitive shade of meaning. His mind is both shrewd and credulous ; he can see the underside of many things, but at the same time his changeableness keeps him on the surface. He is ready, on every occasion, to believe appearances, to accept the marvellous. A certain M. Basset preaches on the ship and reminds him of a Bourdaloue. 'There is a little of the miraculous in his case,' says Choisy ; and, as he approaches the scene of his mission, God gives him a new grace and new talents. For after all, we know him ; in the Conferences at the Seminary he spoke like any other person ; he even had some difficulty in explaining his meaning. Here he is a torrent of eloquence . . . If they had been going on a real apostolic mission, I should have considered twice before doubting this sudden infusion of eloquence in M. Basset ; but, in the present case, we have to do with a mystification (this voyage to Siam was nothing more), and it is very clear to everybody that Choisy, in seeing a miracle, assists it with his imagination.

And this same man who is so credulous in the matter of M. Basset, sees very clearly and charmingly renders the art and cleverness of the Jesuits who, no sooner disembarked at one point, at the Cape of Good Hope or in Batavia, among the Protestant Dutch, hasten to set up their observatory and win their welcome on the first day by placing their science and their astronomical telescopes at the service of the popular curiosity. 'They are going to erect their machines, says Choisy, to pay their host at least with a little of Jupiter and Mercury'. And he adds as a moral : 'Intellect is a fine thing for every country'.

However, with that delicate and changeable nature, Choisy did indeed understand, by flashes, the true sense of apostolic inspiration. Speaking of a holy priest he meets at Batavia, he describes him with a happy and simple expression : 'He is a venerable old man who has been nearly thirty years in Cochin-China or in Tonquin : *his past life gives his face a perpetual cheerfulness*'.

Choisy is modest, he does not assert himself, and among the charms of his mind is that of never pretending to be more than he is. While the Jesuits on board devote

\* themselves to astronomy, the other missionaries hold Conferences ; Choisy assists :

' As for me, he writes to Dangeau, I try a little of everything, and if I am not becoming learned, which is not possible since I did not become so in your school, I shall at least have a slight smattering of many things. I have a listener's place in all their assemblies, and I often follow your methods ; great modesty, no itching to speak. When the ball naturally comes round to me, and I feel that I am thoroughly well informed on the matter in question, then I yield to force and speak in a low voice ; modest in the tone of my voice as well as in speech. That makes an admirable impression : and often, when I do not open my mouth, they think that I do not wish to speak ; whilst the true reason of my silence is a profound ignorance, which it is well to hide from the eyes of mortals. Besides it is something to have profited by your lessons '.

At one time he takes it into his head to study Euclid ; one should do a little of everything. Arrived at the Cape, they rectify the longitude, which is at fault ; he describes the operation and adds : ' I was not altogether useless ; while Father de Fontenei was at his telescope, and the others were looking after the clocks, I would sometimes say, *One, two, three, four*, to mark the seconds '. How can one feel angry with an amiable mind that gives itself away like this ?

His tone throughout is animated, his style brisk, playful, wanton, alert ; but do not expect him to be grave or deep. He speaks cheerfully of zephyrs, and even very familiarly of the tempest. On approaching the Cape of Good Hope, we should expect him to rise to the level of his subject and to adapt his thoughts to the majesty of the horizons : ' The sea begins to be very hollow, that is to say, we are sometimes in a valley between two mountains of white foam. That appears absurd at first ; but when a moment after we are on the mountain, and the whole horizon is beneath, we hold our peace : *mirabiles elationes maris* '. There we have a suggestion of depth and reflection : but do not count upon its lasting. When after doubling the Cape of Storms, he experiences one in his turn, when he is surrounded by the raging elements, he can find nothing better to say than that the sea has a different face (*minois*) than on the previous days. The man who can bring in the word *minois* in presence of such scenes is judged

by that same expression. The Abbé de Choisy still looks through the lessening end of his glass when he contemplates the ocean.

People who have made long sea voyages assure us that nothing can equal the weariness of oneself and one's companions that one feels in the long run. They soon become intolerable to one another; little faults become exaggerated. They long to separate for a time, to meet again later without too much dislike. That is not the case with our Abbé, and nothing proves better how easy-going, benevolent and fundamentally sociable he is. Not only does he feel no tedium, but he never complains of his companions; the longer the voyage lasts, the more he is charmed with them. When they are ready to lose heart, he is the first to restore them to good spirits and revive their hopes: 'All will go well; we have begun too well not to finish well. If we do not reach Siam, we shall spend the winter at Surat, at Bantam, in beautiful countries; *we like each other so much! we shall be together all the longer . . .*' He says that after three months of voyage, he says it again after five months; he cannot find enough words to congratulate himself on this voyage; he sees in it the finger of God wishing to save him from peril. Whatever happens, he thinks, 'I shall still have had a fine voyage; I shall have learned many little things; I shall hardly once have offended God during two years. Alas! perhaps on that account they will be the two best years of my life. Ah! what could we do to offend God on this ship? We speak of nothing but good things; we see only good examples. Temptations lie three or four thousand leagues from here'. And he continues to see everything in a good light and to demonstrate to his friend in France that the days pass like moments, and that he is the happiest of men on board the ship: 'The Breviary, the Conferences, the Holy Scripture, Portuguese, Siamese, the globe, a little chess, above all good cheer, and gay hearts: do better if you can'.

We are beginning, are we not? to know a little of the character, the light-heartedness, and also the charming wit of the Abbé de Choisy, and perhaps to pardon him. Duclos defined him very well as a pleasing writer, whose style has *the negligent graces of a woman*.

Choisy has besides that kind of intellectual courage

which goes very well with light-heartedness. Under his missionary air he quite belongs to that race of the French of the olden times, who doubted nothing, who would go with a light heart and at a venture to the other end of the world, sustained through all their adversities by their cheerfulness, trusting their security on every occasion to God, to their star, to the first inspiration of the moment. 'We are indeed making this voyage *à la française*', he says in one place, giving to understand that nothing had been foreseen in advance; and he is right.

When he has reached the destination of his voyage, that kingdom of Siam where he hoped to make so fine a conquest, and which other travellers described as so miserable a place, Choisy becomes a very superficial, a very inaccurate guide, always judging by externals, by *eidola*, as Plato would say, and much amused by the details of parades, ceremonies and harangues. The only serious thing he does is to enter the Seminary and receive the Holy Orders *in four days*, at the hands of a bishop *in partibus*. The King of Siam is ruled by a favourite, an adventurer of Greek nationality, called Constance, a clever, cunning man who, feeling that he is hated by the natives, had called in the strangers under the pretext of religion, with the idea of obtaining their support. After speaking of this M. Constance, who neglected no means to attract and dazzle him, Choisy sums him up very prettily: 'In a word, he is a rascal who would be a man of wit at Versailles'. He always translates into French.

Later, and not till after his return, Choisy became aware that he had only played a show part in that distant country, and that it was Father Tachard, a Jesuit, who had carried on the real and secret negotiations with Constance. Choisy thought himself even wronged by this Father and robbed of a certain fine present which should have been his: 'I did not know all the truth of this affair, he says, until I was back in France; but, when I saw myself in my good country, I was so happy that I felt no rancour against anybody'. Choisy recurs several times to this idea that he is devoid of rancour and has no enemies: 'If I knew of anybody who wished me ill, I would go at once to him and show him so many civilities, so many kindnesses, that he would become my friend in spite of

himself'. Here again we see that obliging, amiable and complaisant nature that would vainly seek in itself the power of hatred. In every respect, the contrary of Alceste and M. de Montausier.

This voyage to Siam rehabilitated the Abbé de Choisy to some degree in public opinion and put the finishing touch to his reputation for singularity, but it was a less compromising reputation than that which he had gained in his youth. He returned to Court, but he suffered some mortification at first, instead of hearing the compliments which he expected. At the time when he left France, his friend the Cardinal de Bouillon, Grand-Almoner, was in favour, and Choisy thought that a few presents sent to him by the King of Siam would be acceptable. Unfortunately, in the interval of the voyage, the Cardinal de Bouillon had incurred the displeasure of Louis XIV, and the presents which arrived at Versailles were addressed to a banished man. This mischance caused a scandal. Choisy thought it his duty to make his excuses to the King, who said nothing more than: *That is enough*, and abruptly turned his back upon him. 'I thought it right to let the storm blow over, adds the poor mortified one, and went to Paris and shut myself up in my Seminary, where half an hour's prayer before the Holy Sacrament soon made me forget all that had happened'. It needed no less than this prayer before the Holy Sacrament to comfort the courtier Abbé for the misfortune of having for a moment displeased his master—his other master.

A few months after, in order to make his peace, the Abbé de Choisy offered and dedicated to Louis XIV a *Life of David*, then a *Life of Solomon*, with all kinds of grand and flattering allusions; and, in general, all the Histories that he composed since that time, his *History of the Church*, his Histories of divers Kings of France, invariably appeared with Dedications to Louis XIV, conceived in terms in which all the forms of idolatry are exhausted. The French Academy elected Choisy among its members in 1687; M. Bergeret, who received him, began by speaking of his *great-great-grandfather* the Chancellor de L'Hôpital, and was not afraid of comparing Mme de Choisy, the same who had brought up her son so strangely, to the illustrious *Cornelius* of Rome. *Cornelia*, mother of the Gracchi, and the mother of the Abbé de Choisy!

fortunately on this subject we are already accustomed to incongruities.

During the thirty-seven years that the Abbé de Choisy still lived (1687-1724), he never ceased writing and composing on every kind of subject ; he did so without any pretensions, with a charm which did not savour of learning or study, but which did not exclude a certain amount of research. His historical quartos on Saint Louis, on Philip of Valois, on Charles V, etc., etc., had a very fair success at the time ; they were to be seen on the dressing-tables of the ladies, for whom they were particularly intended : they belonged to that class of books which *are very readable*, as Mme de Sévigné would say. Choisy's talent consisted in introducing into every subject a familiar ease and a rapidity which won the reader and carried him away. Sacred history, profane history, moral or edifying tales, it was all the same to him ; his pen was always cut and ready for anything. Set him to treat of morality in action or the Golden Legend, and tell him to extract from it something to rival the Fairy Tales of Mme d'Aulnoi or Perrault ; he is the man to accept the wager. He will carry on the narrative of the most serious events with the same ease and freedom as if he were writing the tale of Ass's Skin : that is a talent. A little wantonness is perceptible from time to time ; the nature of the writer peeps through and reappears. It was he who, when he had reached the termination of his *History of the Church*, in eleven quarto volumes, relieved his feelings with the words : ' Thanks to God, my History is done, I will now begin to learn it '.

Of his numerous writings which I cannot even think of enumerating, there is only one that still deserves to be read : that is his *Memoirs*. They consist of a number of pieces which are not always ended. The Abbé de Choisy writes as he talks, as he knows how to talk ; he loves to open a parenthesis, and when a new subject interests him, he will break off and drop the previous one. He promises to tell us much about the King, and he also tells us about himself : ' I am a bit of a babbler with my pen in my hand ; you see that I do not write with much method, and that I hardly think of what I am saying. However, I promise you very seriously that I will almost always converse with you about the King, that shall be

my continuous bass ; and if, from time to time, you come across me in some corner, you may pass me by '. Such as they are, these Memoirs are very lively, very amusing, and, saving the inaccuracies with regard to facts and dates which may be detected in them, very faithful in respect of the tone and the spirit of the things and people he introduces. The Abbé de Choisy had the art of making well-informed persons, those he called *old repertoires*, talk. He did not cry aloud the fact that he was writing his Memoirs ; he was supposed to be engaged upon the older periods of the history of France, or at least of the history of the Church, to be interested only in Comte Dunois and the fair Agnes, and the politicians were not on their guard before him. He put his questions without any eagerness, he says, with an appearance of ingenuousness and simple curiosity : ' I make M. Roze speak of the times of Cardinal Mazarin ; I converse with M. de Brienne . . . I listen to the chatter of old dame Du Plessis-Bellière, who is not in her dotage . . . I sometimes extract a word from the bonhomme Bontemps ; I get a dozen out of Joyeuse, and a score out of Chamarrante, who is delighted if you keep him company : there is nothing like gout in the hands and feet to loosen the tongue '. We may understand how these Memoirs, written down after these conversations, should exhibit inaccuracies of detail, and yet give a very true impression as a whole. Anecdotes, witticisms, those things which are told in society and are found amusing, he abounds in. Like most of the writers of the time, Choisy excels in portraits. His portraits of Fouquet, of Le Tellier, of Lyonne and Colbert, those four men who assumed a rank after the death of Mazarin, are admirably caught and go beyond even the ordinary range of the writer : Choisy had to do with good talkers on the days when he painted them with so sure a hand. As soon as Mazarin was dead, these four men who had kept their counsel as long as he was in power, and had disguised their pretensions or their weaknesses in order the better to advance their fortune, thought they had no more need to observe the same restraint, and *each of them declared himself* : ' The man of ambition (Fouquet) discharged himself of plans and had the insolence to say : *What height can I not reach ?* The miser (Le Tellier) amassed money ; the



man of pride (Colbert) knitted his brow ; the voluptuary (Lyonne) no longer concealed himself in the dark '. Then followed the detailed portraits of Fouquet, Le Tellier and Lyonne. Here is the beginning of Colbert's portrait :

' Jean-Baptiste Colbert had by nature a forbidding face. His hollow eyes, his thick, black eyebrows, gave him an austere look, and made him fierce and difficult of approach at first ; but, after pacifying him, one found him easy enough to deal with, quick and of an imperturbable assurance. He was convinced that good faith is the solid foundation of public affairs. A persistent industry and an insatiable desire to learn stood him in stead of knowledge ; the more ignorant he was, the more knowing did he affect to appear, and he would sometimes quote inappropriate Latin passages that he had learned by heart, and which his salaried doctors had explained to him. He had no passion since he left off drinking wine ; faithful in his offices as Superintendent, his predecessors in which had filled their pockets without counting and without keeping accounts ; rich by the King's bounties alone, which he did not waste, since he foresaw well enough, as he confided to his particular friends, the prodigality of his eldest son . . . A solid but dull intellect, born chiefly for making calculations, he cleared up all the confusion which the Superintendents and the treasurers of the savings bank had purposely introduced into their affairs in order to fish in troubled waters . . .'

You should read the remainder in the original. We see that Choisy was not all softness, or at least that his soft wax was sometimes capable of receiving some strong impressions. If Choisy is so well able to draw men's portraits, with greater reason does he excel in those of women. He made a delightful one of Mme de La Vallière, which may rightly be placed face to face with that of Colbert whom we have seen with his furrowed brow :

' She had a beautiful complexion, fair hair, a pleasant smile, blue eyes, and a glance so tender and at the same time so modest, that it won one's heart and one's esteem at the same moment : not much wit, but she adorned it every day by continual reading. No ambition, no aims ; attentively considerate to those she loved rather than eager to please them ; quite absorbed in herself and her passion, which was the only one of her life ; preferring honour to all things, and more than once exposing herself to death, rather than allow her frailty to be suspected ; a gentle, timid, liberal disposition ; never forgetting that she was doing wrong, always hoping to return to the good path ; Christian sentiments which drew upon her all the treasures

of mercy, by giving her a long life spent *in the solid, and even intense joy, of an austere penitence*. I speak of her with pleasure : I passed my childhood with her . . .'

In this case Choisy saw and felt, he speaks from the source and has no need of anybody to inspire him. Such were the writers who were almost considered mediocre in the time of Louis XIV. But what a pleasing, familiar, light and delicate language, full of those unfinished turns and those negligences which he in the very genius of conversation and which penetrate the more readily, if we may say so, into the folds of one's thought ! As a writer of Memoirs Choisy greatly resembles Mme de Caylus ; and perhaps, of the two, Mme de Caylus is the firmer, the more exact with her pen, and the more contained. It is he who betrays the woman more than she.

I should never end if I tried to say everything about a writer so abundant and so diffuse. But it is enough to have made known his principal features and his best sides. D'Alembert in his *Eulogies*, the Marquis d'Argenson in his *Memoirs*, have devoted some perfect Notices to Choisy. Since this is a day of recreation, let us not show ourselves too severe ; Choisy has some claims to indulgence : he was frivolous and light-hearted rather than corrupt : he remained natural in the midst of all his strangest caprices ; on a certain day he felt a sincere piety which he tried to sustain ; he did his best, during his last thirty years, to become serious and grave, and could never help being amusing and amiable. In short he spoke, he wrote familiarly an excellent language, and of that large number of works which he composed, one at least deserves to live, to take its place in the estimable series of historical testimonies. Even his life has its corner in history as one of the most singular anecdotes of the great century.

## MADAME DE LA VALLIÈRE

*Monday, March 10, 1851.*

THE Abbé de Choisy brings us naturally enough to Mme de La Vallière through the graceful portrait of her which we quoted. Mme de La Vallière is one of those subjects and those names which are ever youthful and ever fresh in France : she represents the ideal of the loving woman with all the qualities of disinterestedness, of fidelity, of unique and delicate tenderness, which we like to think united in her ; and no less does she represent in perfection the pathetic and sincere penitent. When viewed at close quarters and in reality, her life corresponds very well to the idea we have formed of it from a distance and through its halo ; her personality answers in every point to the charming reputation that she left behind her. Without claiming to have discovered anything new about her we will give ourselves the pleasure of considering her for a moment.

Françoise-Louise de La Baume Le Blanc de La Vallière was baptized on the 7 August 1644, in the parish church of Saint-Saturnin at Tours ; she was probably born the day before. She lost her father at an early age ; her mother, who married again a man who had a place at Court, obtained for her the position of maid of honour at the Court of Madame when this sister of Charles II married the brother of Louis XIV (1661). Madame's Court was all youth, wit, beauty, amusement and intrigue. Mlle de La Vallière, then seventeen years of age, is at first only described as being 'very pretty, very sweet, and very naïve'. The young King was paying more attention to Madame, his sister-in-law, than was becoming. The Queen-mother, Anne of Austria, jealous of Madame who was robbing her of her son's love, objected strongly, in the name of morals, to this intimacy : in order to cultivate

and conceal it more easily, it was arranged between Madame and Louis that the King should play the lover of one of the Princess' maids of honour, which would provide him with a natural excuse for joining all the parties and coming there at all hours. In order to conceal their game more effectually, it was proposed that as many as three ladies should act a part in the deception, Mlle de Pons, Mlle de Chemerault, and Mlle de La Vallière. The latter more especially was chosen by the King to make love to. But, whilst, by distinguishing this pretty young lady, he was only thinking of throwing dust in the eyes of the world and *blinding* the public with her, the King was himself blinded and fell seriously in love.

Mlle de la Vallière's beauty was of a tender and exquisite nature and quality, about which there was only one voice among contemporaries. The engraved portraits, even the paintings, cannot now give us a correct idea of the kind of charm which was peculiar to her. Freshness and brilliancy, a delicate brilliancy, shaded and sweet, formed an essential part of it. 'She was amiable, writes Mme de Motteville, and her beauty had a great charm by reason of the brilliance of her white and pink complexion, the blue of her eyes which were very soft, and the beauty of her silvery hair which heightened that of her face'. The silvery fairness of her hair, joined to that bright and transparent complexion, and the soft blue of her glance, were accompanied by a touching sound of voice which went to the heart; in her all was harmoniously blended. Tenderness, which was the soul of her personality, was tempered by a visible foundation of virtue. Modesty, grace, a simple and ingenuous grace, an air of bashfulness which won one's esteem, invested and inspired all her movements with charm. 'Although she limped slightly, she danced very well'. A little slow in her walk, she would suddenly, when necessary, appear to be borne on wings. Later, in the Convent, one of her greatest tortures and mortifications was caused by her shoes, which, as long as she was in the world, she could have adapted to her slight infirmity. Being very slim and even rather thin, the riding-habit became her very well; the close-fitting coat set off the slenderness of her figure, and 'the cravats made her appear more plump'. Altogether, hers was a touching and not a triumphant beauty, a type of beauty which is not complete

in itself, which does not lie solely in the perfections of the body, as they appear to the eye, but which needs to be blended with soul (and with her, soul was always blended with it); it was a kind of beauty of which one cannot help saying, after taking it in at a glance: 'It is a charming face and soul'.

The King loved her then, and for some years he loved her alone and very violently: as for her, she loved him for himself, she loved the King and not his royalty, the man still more than the king. Naturally modest and virtuous, she was much ashamed of her love, although she yielded to it, and resisted to the best of her powers all the testimonies of honour and favour which aimed at making it public. Louis XIV consented and conspired to keep it secret as long as the Queen-mother was alive. From a note of Colbert we learn all the circumstances and details of the first two confinements of Mme de La Vallière, who was removed, for the purpose, from the apartments of Madame's maids of honour to quarters in the garden of the Palais-Royal. Colbert was charged to make all arrangements in the greatest secrecy. The two first children born of this liaison, two boys who did not live long, were held at the font by former domestics, poor people, among whom was a real parish *pauper*. But what must cause more astonishment is that in October 1666, on the occasion of the birth of a daughter who was Mlle de Blois, Mme de La Vallière, who was then with Madame at Vincennes, kept her secret so well up to the last moment, that she did little more than pass from the princess' chamber into the hands of the midwife who was concealed quite near, and that, *on the very evening* of her confinement, she reappeared in Madame's apartments before the whole company, stayed up late with her head uncovered, her hair arranged for the ball, as if nothing had happened. It may be conjectured what must have been her moral sufferings when shame forced her to such constraint. The Queen-mother, indeed, was dead at this time, and there was nothing but her own feelings to dictate this secrecy. The King's mistresses who came after her did not put so much restraint upon themselves.

Speaking one day of Mme de Fontanges, that rather silly and conceited mistress, Mme de Sévigné wrote, contrasting her with Mme de La Vallière: 'She is always

in a languishing state, but so affected by greatness, that we must imagine her to be the precise contrary of *that little violet hiding under the grass*, who was ashamed of being a mistress, a mother and a duchess: there will never be another cast in the same mould'.

At the very beginning of her liaison with the King, Mme de La Vallière had already thought of the convent; she twice took refuge in it before her third and final retreat. The first time that she took flight was during the early and rosiest period of her amours. Madame's Court was, as I have said, a maze of intrigues and cross gallantries. Mme de La Vallière had heard in confidence from a friend about Madame's manœuvres and her game with the Comte de Guiche; she did not tell the King. But she was too simple and too naturally straightforward to keep anything concealed for long: the King became aware that she was holding something in reserve, and flew into a great passion. La Vallière, who was timid and had promised her friend secrecy, persisted in her silence, and the King left her more angry than ever. 'They had arranged several times, says Mme de La Fayette, that, if ever they had a quarrel, they would never go to sleep without a reconciliation and without writing'. The night passed without any word or message; in the morning, Mme de La Vallière, thinking that all was over, left the Tuileries in despair and went and hid herself in a convent, not Chaillot this time, but Saint-Cloud. The King was beside himself when he was told that no one knew what had become of La Vallière; he succeeded, however, in finding out where she was; he rode in all haste, with four others, to bring her back at once, ready to have the convent burnt down if she was not given up. There was no need to go to such extremes: he found La Vallière prostrate on the floor of the outer parlour of the convent, all in tears; she had been refused admission to the interior. He burst into tears and said to her: 'You do not love me, and you have no care for those who love you'. He said that or something like it, or he should have said it. At this time the King was madly in love with her, to the extent of being jealous of the past, and uneasily conscious of not being the first to have a place in her heart, suspecting an early love affair in the provinces with a certain M. de Bragelone. Mme de La Vallière's second flight to the convent took place

under very different circumstances. The years of happiness were past; Mme de Montespan, witty, haughty, dazzling, had taken her place and was throning in her turn in the master's heart, and the poor La Vallière was pining. On Shrove-Tuesday of 1671 there was a ball at Court, at which she did not appear; it transpired that she had gone to take refuge in the Convent of Holy Mary at Chaillot. This time the King did not hasten in search of her himself; he sent Lauzun and Colbert, who brought her back. It is said that he wept again, but only a few tears, and the last. Mme de La Vallière returned, not in triumph this time, but like a victim. The three years that she lived at Court after that were one long trial and torture.

She would often say to Mme de Maintenon, in this interval when she was preparing and hardening herself for her final retreat: 'When I have any trouble at the Carmelites, I will remember what these people (the King and Mme de Montespan) made me suffer'.

She suffered at the hands of a rival what she, though so gentle and so indulgent, had however made another suffer. The Queen, wife of Louis XIV, had indeed felt very keenly the favour enjoyed by Mme de La Vallière, which began so shortly after her marriage, and she had shed more tears over it than was generally supposed from her apparent coldness. 'Do you see that girl with diamond ear-rings? it is her the King loves', the Queen said one day in Spanish to Mme de Motteville, pointing to Mlle de La Vallière who was crossing the apartment. At this time the Queen's heart only suspected the infidelity; when afterwards she was informed of it on reliable authority, the certainty made her shed many tears. In May 1667, the King, before leaving to join the army, had sent an Edict to Parliament, with a preamble which was said to have been written by Pellisson's fine pen; by this Edict he acknowledged a daughter he had had by Mme de La Vallière, and conferred upon the mother the title and honours of a duchess. The Queen and the ladies of the Court went to pay the King a visit when he was with the army in Flanders. Mme de La Vallière, quite ashamed and distressed as she was by the new greatness that had been thrust upon her, but carried away by her love, came without having been commanded by the Queen, and almost in spite of herself.

When they were in sight of the camp, against the explicit orders of the Queen that nobody should precede her, Mme de La Vallière could not restrain herself and drove at full gallop across the fields, straight to the place where she expected to find the King : ' the Queen saw it ; she was tempted to send after her to stop her, and fell into a terrible passion '. Such was the boldness of the modest La Vallière in sight of the whole Court. So true it is that the most bashful cease to be so when their passions are once released and carry them away. Was she not right when afterwards she said with self-accusations, in her *Reflections on the Mercy of God*, that her glory and *ambition* (we must understand her to mean her ambition and joy at being loved and preferred) had been like *wild horses* dragging her soul to the precipice ? The words appeared too strong to have been written by Mme de La Vallière. I think this incident justifies them.

Among the ladies who appeared most scandalized by this unwonted audacity of Mme de La Vallière, one was especially remarked who said : ' God preserve me from ever being a king's mistress ! but if ever I was so unfortunate as that, I should never have the effrontery to appear before the Queen '. This scrupulous lady, who so openly declared her principles, was Mme de Montespan, the same who at this very time was trying, with all her brilliant powers of coquetry and all her sallies of wit, to supplant the poor La Vallière in the master's favour.

It is time to come to the feelings of grief and repentance which purified Mme de La Vallière's passion, and gave to the last thirty-six years of her life the sanctification without which she would have been no more than a rather pathetic, but ordinary, king's mistress. When she returned to Court in 1671, after her flight to the Chaillot convent, the mockery was great. All the women of society, all the women of wit, even Mme de Sévigné, thought that she lacked dignity. The truth is that dignity and love seldom go together, and that as long as a woman loves, as long as she still has any hope, however small it may be, she holds everything else cheaply. They smiled then at Mme de La Vallière and her religious fancies which did not last : ' With regard to Mme de La Vallière, wrote Mme de Sévigné to her daughter (27 February 1671), we are in despair that we cannot send her back to Chaillot ; but she



is more firmly established at Court than she has been for a long time; you must make up your mind to leave her there'.<sup>1</sup> And again (15 December 1673): 'Mme de La Vallière says no more about retreats; the mere mention of it was enough: her *femme de chambre* threw herself at her feet to prevent her: could anybody resist that?' The poor victim was seen to figure, not only at Court, but among the followers and in the train of her rival. 'Mme de Montespan, abusing her advantages, says Mme de Caylus, affected to be waited upon by her, praised her, saying that she was not pleased with her attire unless she had put the final touch to it. Mme de La Vallière for her part set about it with all the zeal of a *femme de chambre* whose fortune depends upon the degree of charm she gives her mistress'. Such was the talk of the world, which loves to humble and blacken all that have shone, ready afterwards to pity the object of their cruelty: thus they played on all the strings of emotion and conversation. Can we believe what Madame the mother of the Regent adds, when she tells us with her quite Teutonic candour: 'The Montespan, who had more wit, openly made a jest of her, treated her very badly, and obliged the King to do the same. One had to cross La Vallière's chamber to reach the Montespan's apartment. The King had a pretty spaniel called *Malice*. On the Montespan's instigation he took this little dog and threw it at the Duchesse de La Vallière, saying: *Here, Madame, here is company good enough for you*. That was all the harder, because instead of remaining with her, he only passed through her room to go to the Montespan. However, she suffered it all in patience'. What was passing, during this time, in this sincere and tender soul, in this repentant soul,

<sup>1</sup> We read in the Memoirs of Canon Maucroix, on the occasion of a visit he made to Fontainebleau in August 1671:

'M. Barrois (another canon) and I having seen His Majesty's coaches in the court of the Oval, waited nearly an hour, and at last we saw the King enter his carriage; Mme de La Vallière placed first, the King after her, and then Mme de Montespan, all three on the same seat, for the carriage was very large. The King was very bravely dressed in a brown stuff with a great deal of gold lace trimming; his hat was edged with it; his face was rather red. La Vallière I thought very pretty, and she was stouter than I had imagined. I thought Mme de Montespan very handsome, her complexion especially was admirable. The whole disappeared in a moment'.

There we have Mme de La Vallière's life at Court from 1671, the King between her and Mme de Montespan, an every-day martyr; and the gaping crowd looks on with admiration!

which was drinking of the cup of bitterness, and apparently with her own will, as if to punish herself where she had sinned? She has herself recorded the secret feelings of her heart in a series of *Reflections on the Mercy of God*, which she wrote on her recovery from a serious illness she had in those years.

This little work, which first appeared in 1680, during her life-time, has since been frequently reprinted: but we must inform the readers who think they know it from the edition published by Mme de Genlis, and from the later editions in general, that its style has been continually altered and weakened, and that they have not in their hands the real and pure confession of Mme de La Vallière.

At the beginning she compares herself with those three great sinners, the Canaanitish woman, the woman of Samaria and Mary Magdalen. Speaking of the first, the *Canaanitish woman*, she exclaims: 'Look upon me sometimes and let me come near to you as you did that poor stranger, I mean, *Louï*, like a *poor dog*, that is only too happy to pick up the crumbs that fall from the table at which you feast you elect'. The expression is frank even to crudity, but it is sincere, and in reproducing the text of Mme de La Vallière, there was no need to suppress it, especially when the editors assert that *they have not taken the liberty to alter a single word*.

Side by side with this we find more pleasing thoughts, more in keeping with the idea we have formed of this delicate and timid soul: 'For, alas! I am so weak and so changeable, that my best desires are like that flower of the field spoken of by your Prophet-King, that flowers in the morning and withers in the evening'. To guard herself against her relapses, her weaknesses, 'from the sweet poison of pleasing this world and loving it', she invokes one of those *strokes of mercy* which afflict, humble, and at the same time turn a soul to God. This word *mercy*, which appears in the title of the book, recurs at every moment; it abounds on her lips, it is her cry; it is also part of the name she adopted upon entering upon the religious life, *Sister Louise of Mercy*. Recently it has been doubted whether this little work was really written by Mme de La Vallière; but is not the word *mercy* itself, brought in with such manifest intention, a kind of signature?

We find, we divine some more or less covert allusions

to her humiliations and sufferings : ' But if, she says, as a penitence in some sort befitting my misdeeds, it is your will (O my God !), that, as a necessary duty, I still remain in the world, to suffer *on that same scaffold where I have so often offended you*, if you will that my sin be my punishment, by making those the tormentors of my heart whom I had made its idols : *Paratum cor meum, Deus* (my heart is prepared, O Lord !)' . Whilst awaiting the great stroke that she hopes for, she resolves to profit by the smallest inner succour to walk in the path of repentance : ' I will not then wait, O my God ! until the full sun of your justice be risen, to leave my perilous slumbers. As soon as the dawn of your Grace shall begin to break, I will begin to act, and to labour at the work of my salvation . . . I will be content to advance and grow in your love like the dawn, *gradually and imperceptibly* . . . ' We naturally compare these words with those written by Bossuet, on the subject of Mme de La Vallière, on the eve of her full conversion : ' It seems to me, he said, that she is advancing her affairs a little in her own way, *gradually and slowly*' . So her habitual progress, even on the road of salvation, was slow and gradual, and had an air of soft nonchalance, until love gave her wings to soar upon.

' He who loves, runs, flies and rejoices ; he is free and nothing will stop him ' . They are the words of the *Imitation of Jesus Christ* : Mme de La Vallière, who had so often realized this in the order of human sentiments, was soon able to repeat it to herself in the course of her celestial progress.

Towards the end of the *Reflections* we may recognize the strong bursts of that tender love which is about to be transformed into a divine passion and into charity. The *half-penitent* (as she calls herself) is wholly occupied in urging her soul to transfer, to *transpose* its love ; this soul must henceforth turn and give to God alone what it had wasted elsewhere upon the gods of earth : ' May it love you (O Lord !) with a *keen and loving grief* for its past infidelities, and with all the awe and religious tremor that your sovereign Majesty deserves ' .

In appraising a work of such simplicity, to speak of talent and imagination as usually understood, would hardly be in keeping. Two or three passages only exhibit a rather picturesque and graphic expression :

'It is true, Lord, that if the prayer of a Carmelite who has retired into solitude, and whose only desire is to fill her soul with your grace, is like a sweet perfume-box which needs but to be brought near the fire to give forth a very sweet odour, the prayer of a poor creature who is still attached to the earth, and who only creeps in the path of virtue, is like those muddy waters which must be distilled drop by drop to obtain from them a useful liquor'.

This little work, in which two or three touches at the most do not perhaps entirely harmonize with the classical idea we have formed of Mme de La Vallière, has been attributed to her by the most constant tradition, and was counted to her credit by her contemporaries: 'It is certain, says Mme de Caylus, that the style of piety was more in accordance with her mind than that of the Court, since she appeared to make frequent use of it'. Mlle de Montpensier said likewise: 'She is a very good nun and is now considered to be very intellectual: Grace can do more than nature, and the effects of the one have been more advantageous to her than those of the other'. If Mme de la Vallière, who had been denied any intellect in the worldly sense, was considered to be very intellectual in the direction of piety, it must have been owing in great part to this little book which was read in society and attributed to her.

Mme de La Vallière's letters to the Maréchal de Bellefonds, and Bossuet's letters to the same Maréchal on the subject of Mme de La Vallière, complete the inner picture of her conversion. The Maréchal de Bellefonds, a man of merit and piety, had a sister who was a nun at the Carmelites of the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, into which convent Mme de La Vallière intended to retreat. He exhorted and strengthened the poor soul in trouble to the best of his power, whilst Bossuet also sustained and urged her forward.

'I have seen M. de Condom (Bossuet), and I have opened my heart to him, wrote Mme de La Vallière to the Maréchal (21 November 1673): he wonders at the great mercy that God has shown me, and urges me to carry out at once his holy will; he is even convinced that I shall do it sooner than I think. Since I saw him, two days ago, the rumour of my retreat has spread far and wide, and all my friends and relations have spoken to me of it. They are prematurely pitying me

on my lot : I do not know why they should speak of me, for I have not done anything remarkable ; I think it is God who permits it in order to attract me to him the sooner '.

We cannot find a single word in Mme de La Vallière's letters that is not natural, humble and mild, expressive of strong gratitude to those who wish her well, and of perfect indulgence for others. ' My affairs are not progressing, she writes (11 January 1674), and I obtain no succour from the persons from whom I might have expected it : I must have the mortification of importuning *the master*, and you know what that means for me . . . ' And elsewhere : ' To leave the Court for the Cloister will causè me no pain ; but to speak to the King, oh ! that is my torture '. The sight of her daughter, Mlle de Blois, touched her, but did not shake her resolution : ' I confess that I felt some joy in seeing her pretty as she was ; at the same time I felt a scruple ; I love her, but she cannot keep me back a single moment ; I see her with pleasure, and shall leave her without pain : reconcile that as you please ; I only say what I feel '. These struggles, these last difficulties still drag along and are prolonged for some time, until her persistent resolution is rewarded, and one morning she sounds the note of deliverance :

' At last I am quitting the world, she exclaims on the 19 March 1674. I do so without regret, but not without pain ; my weakness long kept me back without any inclination, or, to speak more correctly, with a thousand sorrows ; you know the greater part of them, and you know my sensibility ; it is not lessened, I am aware of it every day, and I see very well that the future would not give me more satisfaction than the past and the present. You judge rightly that, in the opinion of the world, I should be content, and, by God's will, I am in raptures. I am keenly anxious to respond to the mercies he has shown me, and to abandon myself entirely to him.

' Everybody is leaving at the end of April ; I am leaving too, but mine is the surest road to heaven. God grant that I may progress along it, as I am obliged to do, to obtain pardon for my faults ! My state of mind is so *sweet* and so *cruel*, but at the same time so *decided* (try to reconcile these opposing feelings), that the persons to whom I open my heart admire more than ever God's extreme mercy towards me '.

Speaking of Bossuet, she says : ' As for M. de Condom, his intellect, his goodness and his love of God are wonder-  
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ful'. And indeed, reading at the same time Bossuet's letters on Mme de La Vallière, we are touched by that spirit of goodness, of perfect charity, and even of humility, in the great director of consciences and sublime preacher. He thought at first that Mme de La Vallière was proceeding rather slowly: 'A stronger nature than hers would have made more progress, he wrote; but we must not urge her to do more than she can bear'. Her final resolution, when once it was declared, did not fail to meet with opposition, and even with ridicule. Mme de Montespan especially made great fun of this plan of joining the Carmelites, and it was feared that the King would oppose it: the whole business had to be carefully manœuvred. Bossuet followed with a paternal solicitude these alternative delays and forward steps: 'It seems to me, he said of the humble convert, that her business is progressing without her making any movement. God will not forsake her, and will break her bonds without violence'. Then suddenly, when the last thread is worn through and snaps, when the dove takes its flight, he feels a triumphant joy, and is in his turn full of admiration:

'I send you, he writes to the Maréchal de Bellefonds, a letter from the Duchesse de La Vallière, from which you will see that, by God's grace, she is about to carry out the purpose that the Holy Spirit has put into her heart. The whole Court is edified and astonished at her tranquillity and joy, which increases as the time approaches. In truth, there is something so divine in her feelings, that I cannot think of it without continually thanking God: and the sign of the finger of God is the *strength* and *humility* which accompany all her thoughts; it is the work of the Holy Spirit . . . it charms me and makes me ashamed; *I speak, and she acts; I have words, she has works.* When I consider these things, I feel a desire to hold my tongue and hide myself . . . poor channel through which flow the waters of heaven, and which is hardly able to retain a few drops!'

Thus spoke and thought about himself, with a touching simplicity, this great bishop, the oracle of his time and the most exalted of men by his talent.

On the eve of the day when she quitted the Court, Mme de La Vallière went to sup with Mme de Montespan; she wished to drain the cup to the last drop of dregs and to taste the *refuse of the world*, as Bossuet says, to the last remnant of its bitterness. On the next day, the 20 April

1674, she attended the King's mass, as he was leaving for the army ; at the end of the mass, she asked the Queen's pardon on her knees for her offences, then entered her carriage and drove to the Carmelites of the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, where she passed through a large crowd of people ranged on either side. On entering, she fell on her knees before the Superior, saying : ' My Mother, I have always made such an ill use of my will, that I come to place it into your hands '. Without awaiting the end of her noviciate, on the very day of her entering the Cloister, she had her hair cut off, ' once the admiration of all who spoke of her person '. The charming tree would not await the term of the holy season, and hastened to strip itself of its last crown. On entering the Cloister, Mme de La Vallière was only thirty years of age.

Bossuet was unable to preach the sermon for the *vêture*, or taking of the veil, which took place in June 1674, but he did so on the occasion of the *profession*, that is to say the irrevocable taking of the vows, which took place in June 1675. Mme de La Vallière, now Sister Louise of Mercy, solemnly received the black veil at the hands of the Queen. The expectation of such an occasion may be imagined : ' This beautiful and courageous lady, writes Mme de Sévigné, acted on this as on every other occasion of her life, nobly and charmingly ; her beauty was such that it surprised all the world ; but what will astonish you, is that the sermon of M. de Condom (Bossuet) was not as divine as we expected '. When we read Bossuet's sermon to-day, we can understand and share a little, I confess, in Mme de Sévigné's impression, we say to ourselves that we expected something different. So much the worse for those who expected it and for ourselves ! Bossuet, before being an orator, was a religious man, a real bishop, and, on the present occasion, he felt how necessary it was to be serious, to give no occasion for smiles or allusions, or the secret malice of hearts, which would have delighted in certain reminiscences and certain pictures. He carried his audience at the beginning into the highest and purest regions. He took for his text the words of Him who is seated on the throne, in the Apocalypse : *Behold, I make all things new*, and he applied it to the present case. The more he had seen of Mme de La Vallière in her noviciate, the more he had been struck by her strength and her

exaltation, by the entire renovation of her heart. What he desired before all, in preaching before her, was to bring to this soul a *good word*, and not to shine in the eyes of these worldlings with one of those miracles of eloquence which were so easy and familiar to him :

‘ But take good heed, Messieurs, that here more than ever should we observe the precept that Ecclesiastes gives us : “ The wise man, he says, who hears a wise word, praises it and applies it to himself ”. He looks neither to the right nor to the left, to see whom it may fit ; he applies it to himself, and finds his profit in it. My sister, he added, turning to the new nun, among the things that I have to tell you, you can well distinguish what is appropriate to you. Do you the same, Christians . . . ’

With these simple terms, which cut short all vain and foreign curiosity, did Bossuet broach his subject, and endeavour to define and describe the two kinds of love, the profane and the divine, ‘ the love of self carried to contempt of God ’, and ‘ the love of God carried to contempt of oneself ’.

We do not intend to follow him here. In the picture he drew of the second kind of love and of the efforts of the repentant soul to free itself and return to its divine beginning, there were many touches however of a direct and delicate application. Alluding to the cutting off of the hair which is the first sacrifice of the religious life and not the least, Bossuet borrowed the words of Isaiah :

‘ I saw the daughters of Zion, their head erect, walking mincingly, with studied countenances, making signs with their eyes to right and left ; therefore, said the Lord, *I will make their hair to fall*.—‘ What a vengeance ! continued the great preacher in his turn. What ! was it necessary to thunder and assume so high a tone to make the hair to fall ? This great God, who boasts that he can uproot with his breath the cedars of Lebanon, must he thunder to cause the leaves to fall from the trees ? Is that the effect worthy of an all-powerful hand ? How shameful of man to be so strongly attached to vain things, that to deprive him of them is a punishment ! ’

And describing the soul that strips itself by degrees of its external ornaments, necklaces, bracelets, rings, dress, and *that begins to be nearer to itself*, he added : ‘ But will it dare to touch this *so tender, so cherished, so pampered body* ? He answered with vigour in the name of that.



generous soul that was, on the contrary, about to attack its body as its most dangerous deceiver, declaring immortal and implacable war against all pleasures, having been once deceived by them, and at length laying siege to itself, confining, enclosing and constraining itself on all hands, in order not to leave its liberty the smallest outlet by which to escape and go astray : ' Thus confined on all sides, he said, it can no longer breathe except on the side of Heaven'.

Having once entered upon this life of prayer and penitence, Mme de La Vallière never turned back for a single instant. She was sometimes visited by the Queen, even by Mme de Montespan : she avoided as far as she could these communications with the outer world. One day Mme de Montespan asked her if she was really as happy as they said she was : ' No, she replied with a tact that the mind borrows from the heart, I am not happy, I am content '. *Content* is indeed the Christian word, the word that expresses peace, tranquillity, submission, a joy without dissipation, and something contained besides.

When she entered the convent, Mme de La Vallière had two children still living. Her son, the Comte de Vermandois, died in the flower of his age (1683), already corrupted and sullied by the vices of the young Court. Bossuet was charged with announcing to the mother this painful bereavement. At the first moment she had only tears ; as soon as she was able to reply, the penitent within her regained the upper hand, and she said : ' It is too soon to mourn over the death of a son whose birth I have not yet sufficiently mourned '. Her daughter, Mlle de Blois, who married the Prince de Conti, was a model of grace ; it was she of whom La Fontaine said, to describe her light and airy walk :

L'herbe l'aurait portée ; une fleur n'aurait pas  
Reçu l'empreinte de ses pas.

When she married the Prince de Conti (1680), the greatest eagerness was shown on all hands to come and congratulate the mother, and she bore this last tribute of the world, which to her was rather a humiliation, with perfect modesty, good grace, and propriety, and was highly extolled for her bearing. Mme de Sévigné began by jesting about it as the best people in the world cannot help doing : ' They say that she (Mme de La Vallière) has perfectly adapted

her style to her black veil, and seasoned her maternal tenderness with that of the bride of Jesus Christ'. But after she had gone herself to the grate and seen Mme de La Vallière, she had only a cry of admiration for a simplicity that was so truly humble and yet so noble :

' But what an Angel appeared to me at last ! . . . In my eyes she had all the charms that we saw in former days ; I did not think her either puffy or yellow ; she is not so thin and happier ; she has the same eyes and the same glances ; the austere life, the poor food and the want of sleep have made them neither hollow nor dull ; the strange habit takes neither from her good grace nor her good manner ; as for her modesty, it is no greater than when she gave to the world a Princesse de Conti ; but it is enough for a Carmelite. She said a thousand civil things, and spoke of you (Mme de Grignan) so well, so appropriately, all that she said was so much in keeping with her personality, that I could not imagine anything better '.

And she finishes up her hymn of praise with this quite worldly reflection : ' In truth, this habit and this retreat are a great dignity for her '.

Mme de La Vallière certainly did not think of making it a dignity for herself. Entirely given up to the sweet and comforting tranquillity of the secluded life, she did not think it too dearly bought at the price of the severities and mortifications which she imposed upon herself with ardour and a sort of refinement. Those who have written the story of her life of penitence have found great satisfaction in mentioning uncommon examples of it, which would affect us too little to-day ; but the principle which inspired them, and the goal she was approaching by these means, are ever worthy of respect at all times, from whatever point of view we may look at them : '*I hope, I believe, and I love*, she said ; it is for God to perfect his gifts'.— '*To hope and believe*, those are the two great virtues ; but he who has not *charity* has nothing : he is like a sterile plant that the sun does not shine upon '. This beautiful soul, realizing henceforth in herself the qualities of the divine love, to the last regarded herself as one of the meanest before God : ' I do not ask of him, she said, those great gifts which are only made for the great souls he has placed in the world to enlighten it, I could not contain them ; but I only pray him to *incline my heart*, according to his word, to seek his law, to meditate over it night and

day'. Such dispositions, whatever the form in which they may be enclosed, are for ever precious, and at all times lead to the sublimity of morality.

Mme de La Vallière died on the 6 June 1710, after thirty-six years spent in the Cloister. Louis XIV had seen her enter the convent *with a dry eye*. He had preserved for her *a dry esteem and consideration*, says Saint-Simon. Here is dryness enough, but it still says too little. He had long ceased to love her; but when she proved that she was able to tear herself away from him and to prefer another, even though that other were only God, he became entirely detached and alienated from her; he never forgave her that step: 'She has often told me, relates Madame the mother of the Regent, that if the King came into her convent, she would refuse to see him and would hide so that he would not be able to find her. She has been saved that pain, for the King has never come. He has forgotten her as completely as if he had never known her'.

Of the three women who really occupied the attentions of Louis XIV, and who shared his heart and his reign, Mme de La Vallière, Mme de Montespan, and Mme de Maintenon, the first remains by far the most interesting, the only one who is really interesting in herself. Intellectually much inferior to the other two, she is incomparably superior to them by her heart: we may say that in this respect she inhabits quite a different sphere, which those two women of wit (the latter of whom was besides a woman of reason) never reached. Whenever we try to form an idea of a perfectly loving woman, we shall think of La Vallière. To love for the sake of loving, without pride, without coquetry, without insult, without any after-thoughts of ambition, interest or narrow reason, then to suffer, to sink her personality, to sacrifice even her dignity as long as she hopes, to let herself be humbled as an expiation; when the hour is come, to immolate herself courageously in the hope of higher things, to find in prayer and with God treasures of energy, of affection and renovation; to persevere, to mature and become stronger at every step, to reach the plenitude of her wit through her heart, such was her life, in the latter part of which she unfolded resources of strength and Christian heroism that one would never have expected from her first delicacy. As a loving woman, she recalls Héloïse or the Por-

tuguese Nun, but with less violence and fire : for the latter two had not only the genius of passion, they had the transport and the fury of it ; La Vallière had only the tenderness of passion. Refined and sweet in soul and beauty, she has more of Berenice in her than the other two. As a nun, as a Carmelite and daughter of Saint Theresa, it is not for us to be so bold as to seek terms of comparison for her. We will merely say, in our least profane tone, that, after reading again the admirable fifth chapter of the third book of the *Imitation*, in which are expressed the effects of the divine love, which in this chapter is only the ideal of the other love, Mme de La Vallière is one of those living figures that explain it in their own person, and are its best commentary.

## M. DE LATOUCHE

Monday, March 17, 1851.

HE is one of those men of whom it is best to speak at the hour of their disappearance from the scene, for he was a man of complicated character, difficult to understand, and posterity only has time to remember what stands out simply and clearly. Every one in his own way has already paid tribute to his memory, a mixed tribute, containing a large portion of restrictions and reserves, but unanimous on one point, intellectual distinction. We will follow the example of others, and say our say on the man of wit, the man of talent who has just vanished, trying to be just, and tempering our justice occasionally with a little of that leniency which we all need on the day of our fall.

I thought at first that I should be unable to say when and where M. de Latouche was born. There are certain handy books in which all of us men of letters have long been arranged in alphabetical order, with the titles and dates of our works, with the date of our birth; all that is wanting is the date of our death. M. de Latouche, one of the men of our days who have written most during the last forty years and in all directions, had the cunning to partly escape this enrolment in the literary register. In vain will you look for him in the *Biographie Rabbe-Boisjolin*. His works are mentioned in full in Quérard's *La France littéraire*, but the date of his birth is wanting. The dandy always carefully concealed his age: though he called himself a democrat, he was not less careful in concealing his name. He was really called *Hyacinthe* (and not Henri) *Thabaud de Latouche*. It appears that he was born at Le Blanc, a little town in Le Berry,<sup>1</sup> in February 1785: which would make him just sixty-six

<sup>1</sup> Others say at La Châtre.

years of age at his death. The family of the Thabauds including several brothers, each of them had adopted, according to the custom of the *ancien régime*, an additional name with a prefix to distinguish him from the others; Hyacinthe's father had added *de Latouche* to his name. All that was very simple. Why then make such a mystery of it? The truth is that M. de Latouche was by nature and disposition not only mysterious, he was secretive.

I do not know where he was educated, and it is not a very important point, for it was one of his misfortunes that his early education was very poor and very incomplete. With so much wit and some really talented parts, but without any original inventiveness or genius, he was one of those who had need of study to begin with, who wanted a good guidance, and a really classical education. He lacked a good foundation. His style always suffered from this want; this style, though sown with many happy touches, was fundamentally deficient in the woof. We must not forget that Latouche was twenty years of age in 1805: we cannot be surprised that his early manhood and youth, passed under the Directoire and the Consulate, should have suffered from the careless education of that epoch. He needed an uncommon personal worth afterwards to make up for the deficiency, as he did, by sentiment.

Under the Empire, he was in the administration; he had an uncle, M. Thabaud, Administrator of the Lottery; he was also a nephew of M. Porcher, Comte de Richebourg, a Senator. He was sent to Rome, I know not in what capacity, and for three years he travelled on horseback through the whole of Italy: that was his real education, to which he owed the true and sympathetic colours with which he was afterwards able, on every occasion, to describe that beautiful country.

Like all the young men of letters during the Empire, he at one time had a post in the Droits-réunis (Excise Office), under the directorship of M. Français (of Nantes). On one of the rare occasions when I had the pleasure of meeting M. de Latouche, I heard him tell a little anecdote which I find recorded by himself in one of his numerous writings; for, if he was a good story-teller, he did not care to waste his stories or his witticisms. This is the story: the young clerk was very unpunctual at his office;

he seldom put in an appearance before two o'clock in the afternoon, and left again at four. The head of the department complained and reported him to the Director-General, Comte Français, who sent for the culprit to his cabinet: "Well! sir, I hear that you are not at the office before two o'clock . . ." — 'That is true, Monsieur le Comte; I do come rather late; the Rue Sainte-Avoie is so far from the Faubourg Saint-Honoré where I live!' — 'But, Sir, you should start an hour sooner.' — 'That is what I do, Monsieur le Comte: but those boulevards, with the caricatures, stop you at every step; an hour soon goes by: I pass the Café Hardi, my friends beckon to me; one must lunch.' — 'But, after all, Sir, you can do all that in a couple of hours; and if you start from your house at nine o'clock, you might still be here at eleven.' — 'Yes, Monsieur le Comte: but then there is the Boulevard du Temple, with the showmen and the marionettes!' — 'The marionettes!' replies Français (of Nantes) with animation. 'What, sir, you stop to look at the marionettes!' — 'Alas! yes, Monsieur le Comte.' — 'But, how can that be? I have never met you there.' That was the end of the administrative lecture.

In 1811 M. de Latouche wrote a little one-act comedy in verse, called *Les Projets de Sagesse*, which was performed at the Théâtre de l'Impératrice (Odéon); it was a sketch in light and rather well-turned rhymes, of the life of a young man of the time, a law student. Delmont, the young man, proposes, after many a prank, to move from the Chaussée d'Antin to the Latin Quarter, and become absolutely steady:

La raison doit enfin disposer de ma vie;  
Je ne veux plus du temps follement abuser,  
Et je n'ai pas vingt ans, Monsieur, pour m'amuser.

These good resolutions, as we may well suppose, do not last long. A few years later (1818), in partnership with M. Émile Deschamps, he produced at the Théâtre Favart a three-act comedy in verse called *Selmours*, which had a fair success, and *Le Tour de Faveur*, first at the Théâtre Favart, then at the Odéon (1818), a one-act play in verse which had a fashionable success, being played a hundred times. This little act, which dealt with authors, actors and journalists, was the germ as it were of two

great comedies, Delavigne's *Les Comédiens* and *Le Folliculaire* of Delaville. It is a pretty plot. A young girl is aroused to enthusiasm by the announcement at the Théâtre-Français of a new tragedy written by a young man of seventeen. But it turns out that the young dramatist is an elderly man of sixty, and a friend of the young lady's father, and that he wrote this play, which is so tardily exhumed by a *turn of favour*, more than forty years before, when he was seventeen. Since then he has forgotten his tragedy and made his fortune in business. The young girl is at first a little disappointed; happily the son of the merchant-dramatist is at hand, and in love with her; he is a young officer on half-pay, who has been through the war and has left the army:

Il était militaire avant qu'on fit la paix.

This simple line, which alluded to the army of the Loire, was always drowned by applause. One should hear M. Emile Deschamps, that man of a pleasing and lively wit, tell about this collaboration, putting himself in the background and giving the principal share of credit to M. de Latouche. The latter was wanting chiefly in style and execution:

'I cannot give you an idea, writes M. Deschamps to me, of the delicacy of his views and the rare quality of his humour, when M. de Latouche *told* the plan of his scenes and certain improvised details. Then he would write his play, and only a few pretty touches would survive in a slipshod, incorrect and obscure style. It would have to be rewritten. It was painful to see so delicate a mind so badly seconded by his talent, and he was the first to feel it. One could know him only very imperfectly if one had not seen him, listened to him and cultivated his intimacy. His conversation was as fascinating as his voice, more fascinating than brilliant, because he was naturally more poetical than witty. When he told you of a work he was writing, the work seemed adorable; then the book would appear, and one would seek in vain, and find hardly a quarter of the charm one had imagined . . .'

Such was M. de Latouche in his best days, in his *green youth* and before the patriotic (as he called it) and quite incurable acrimony of his last years.

Another describes him again in the same half-colours, faithful but softened down, as taking to serious litera-



ture rather late in life, and not without an effort, and often straying away from it; trying his hand in earlier life at poetical subjects imitated more or less from English or German, little plays remarkable for their tone and colour, in which expression lagged behind thought, and which he corrected and worked up again since, without making them any more perfect or more easy; 'an exquisite nature as far as intelligence goes, with insufficient means of manifesting itself; no self-conceit in private intercourse, modestly open to suggestions in the study, painfully shy and peevish before the public; of a generous and disinterested character, but playing his friends and himself a thousand tricks'.

With an ardent, passionate heart, a lively and amorous disposition, he was very careful of his personal appearance and all that conduces to please. Without being handsome he had the power of attraction. He inspired devotion in more than one woman, not to speak of his own wife (for he was married, and to a woman of merit, another fact which he concealed as far as he could); more than one woman had been in love with him. When at school one of his eyes had been injured by a ball at play; he never spoke of this accident. He had small and delicate hands, and was not loathe to show them. His wit, grace and distinction made up for his physical deficiencies. The sound of his voice, as we have just been told, was caressing, insinuating; it had something of the siren's power. It was difficult to tear oneself away from his conversation, which was caressing, too caressing, voluptuous, although the perfidious fellow always took a delight in ending up with some bitter speech which spoiled the honey of his cajoleries. He had a passion for sarcasm. In this respect Marie-Joseph Chénier and Chamfort were his masters.

Although he dreamt much in his life of poetry and fame, he began by writing a great deal for the publishers. I have before me a number of volumes of his works, which he wrote anonymously or under a pseudonym: the *Histoire du Procès Fualdès* (1818); the *Mémoires de Madame Manson* (he paid a visit to Rhodéz on purpose to see her); some *Lettres à David sur le Salon de 1819* (in collaboration with M. Deschamps); the *Biographie pittoresque des Députés* (1820, in collaboration with M. Bert); the *Dernières Lettres de Deux Amants de Barcelone*

(1821), letters supposed to have been written during the plague in that city. We see how keen M. de Latouche was after subjects of interest for the time being, and anything that might bring him into vogue. We may believe that at this time he also thought of his pocket; it is said that with the proceeds of the sale of those *Mémoires de Madame Manson* he was able to secure his modest competence and purchase his little house at Aulnay, that hermitage of the *Vallée-aux-Loups*. Be that as it may, M. de Latouche continued at all times, even when he was beyond the reach of care, to live too much in the present moment, to watch the passing opportunity, to pursue it, to harass it unceasingly, and to grieve when he missed it. His artistic independence suffered thereby. Though he spoke so often of his peasant's retreat, he very often had his head out of the window to listen to what was going in Paris, and whether the vague rumour which reached his ear was not that of his coming fame.

From the *Mémoires de Madame Manson* (1818) he passes to the publication of the *Poems* of André Chénier (1819); the transition was an abrupt one. The publication of André Chénier's *Poems* is Latouche's great title to fame, the great literary fact with which his name will be associated. Let us do him the justice he deserves, without any exaggeration. The name of André Chénier was not entirely unknown in 1819; a few months before his death, the *Décade philosophique* had published his *La Jeune Captive*; Chateaubriand, in a note to his *Génie du Christianisme*, Millevoeye, in a note to his *Elegies*, had also quoted some fragments of him which aroused the keen interest of the rare friends of the Muse. After the death of Marie-Joseph Chénier, M. Daunou became trustee of André's unpublished works; but in the matter of poetry Marie-Joseph had gained a good start of his brother, and it was not till after the success of the former's *Poésies diverses*, that it was decided to print what were merely regarded as a collection of shapeless and incorrect outlines by the latter. Foulon and Baudouin the publishers, who treated with the family for these Works of André, said that they knew a young man of letters who would be able to bring out a first edition with all necessary care; this young man of letters, who was already thirty-four years of age, was M. de Latouche. The papers were handed over to him, and his first glance

resulted in a judgment for which we can never be sufficiently thankful to him, and which is now his chief title to glory. He understood at once that he had to do, not, as was supposed in the world of pure classics and of Marie-Joseph, with a young and interesting poet of great promise, who had left some incorrect fragments which he might have improved with age, but with an already powerful master, an innovator, bold and pure at the same time, pure even in his negligences. In a word, on this occasion M. de Latouche did an act of good taste, original and courageous, which is as rare a thing, nay a rarer thing, than an act of courage in the civil order.

Now, how did he set about the details of the publication ? Was he sufficiently scrupulous, was he as scrupulous as we should be to-day ? Did he not more than once take excessive liberties ? Was he not so bold as to add here and there some touches that he afterwards boasted of and enagerrated, and which he was praised for ? Did he not, on his own authority, make suppressions or even alterations, notably in an Ode addressed by André Chénier to his brother Marie-Joseph ? We may dispute on all these points, and reproach him with a few indiscretions, without on that account diminishing the capital service that he has rendered to the literature and the poetry of the nineteenth century. What would have become of those adorable Poems of André Chénier if they had fallen into other hands, into the hands of an Academician of that time, what cuttings, corrections, grammatical rectifications they might have suffered, we cannot bear to think of. Honour then to M. de Latouche for having appreciated them at once, for having recognized in them the work of a poet and a brother, and for having restored them to us (saving a few points of detail) just as he had received them !

During the next eleven years, and until the end of the Restoration (1819-1830) M. de Latouche shows himself to belong decidedly to the school of poetry which was then called Romantic, whilst his very pronounced opinions marked him as belonging to the liberal party, which did not dream at that time of styling itself democratic. As journalist, novelist, poet, we see him alternating between reveries and the political pamphlet ; he wages little wars in all directions and disperses. I will say what I think

about him as a poet: that was his dearest and most sensitive spot, and also the one by which, incomplete though he is, he touches us most.

He had begun with a kind of ballads imitated from the English and German, with descriptions of the spring, landscapes, which appeared in the literary journals of the time, the *Muse française* or the *Mercure*, and which were collected and published every year in the *Annales romantiques*. He said of the spring, for example, which he pictured in the form of a young child:

De ses doigts teints de pourpre, il touche en souriant  
Le frêle abricotier, l'amandier qui sommeille,  
Le pêcher frissonnant sous sa robe vermeille.

And again:

Qu'il repose un moment sur l'émail de la plaine,  
On voit renaître au feu de sa féconde haleine  
La brune violette, amour du villageois,  
Et la fraise odorante aux lisières des bois.

On account of this sense of freshness and nature, and of a certain ingenious description of several rustic superstitions, M. de Latouche had gained the surname of the *Hesiod of the Romantic School*; he tells us so at least; it is a fine-sounding name. His work rather resembled Delille, but younger, and Chénedollé, but more sprightly and elegant; he has some very pretty descriptive lines:

Quand la fleur de Noël, au fond de nos vallées,  
Frémira sous le dard des premières gelées,  
Nous irons de l'automne entendre encor la voix.

But what is lacking in all these pieces, is invention in the first place, then design, composition, even that very little and very short composition which we find in an idyll or an elegy. They do not hold together, there is no sequence. He has some charming isolated lines, some happy, poetical, elegant combinations of words; he has the elements of everything, 'but the tissue is wanting under his embroidered flowers'. As soon as his inspiration fails him, he cannot write; he will say for example in a poem entitled *Amertume* (*Bitterness*):

Plus le calme a dompté ma fiévreuse énergie,  
Plus je sens m'envahir le néant oppresseur.

Can you imaginè what is a *néant oppresseur* ? In another poem *Au Roitelet* (*To the Wren*, i.e., the 'little king'), which is in great part a satire upon kings (satire easily creeps into everything with Latouche, even into a wren's nest), he describes the young of the pretty bird :

... à peine éclos au jour,  
D'invisibles *enfants*, qui sont ta dynastie,  
Aux premiers feux de *mai* opèrent leur sortie.

I will leave aside the *political* intention, and overlook the hiatus in the last line ; but *opérer une sortie*, is that possible in poetry, and in any other style except that of the bulletin ? We find at every moment in Latouche these unfortunate and eccentric expressions, which disappoint us of what a charming line led us to expect. The spring already announced itself, it seems, under the turf ; it was about to rise and gush forth, but some obstacle or other suddenly comes in the way and prevents it from reaching the surface. Difficulties, sufferings, and struggles, and soon bitterness, anger and rage, that is the whole poetic and moral secret of M. de Latouche.

Walking one day with one of his friends, on the eve of the first and only performance of his comedy, *La Reine d'Espagne*, he said, a prey to intense agitation : ' I am like a woman who sees herself big with child, and who does not know whether the child will come out. And yet, he resumed quivering with energy, *it must out* '. But too frequently, with him, the limbs of the poet came out singly and in pieces.

He lacked in his talent the *ramis felicibus arbos* of Virgil, that facility of talent which is its felicity.

His verses are like the parts of a snake that has been cut in pieces, sparkling, quivering and writhing in the sun-light, but unable to join again. He felt the sparkle of those links and some kind of inner power that animated them : his anger was caused by his inability to join and make a single body of them.

And yet this man has some accents which come from the heart, although they are not sustained. I recommend the poem entitled *Rupture* and beginning : *Brisons des nœuds dont l'étreinte vous blesse* . . . ; but I prefer to quote the piece he called *Dernière Élégie*. The poet has lost by death one dear to him, an adored woman, and he

cannot resign himself to the thought that she is for ever buried under the marble tomb ; he imagines the elements of that airy soul to be scattered in nature, among the most vaporous and smiling objects, and that he can still possess himself of it, surround himself with it ; he exclaims :

Oh ! dites-moi, qu'est-elle devenue ?  
 Dort-elle encor dans la paix des tombeaux ?  
 Ou, compagne des vents et de l'errante nue,  
 Voit-elle un autre ciel et des astres plus beaux ?  
 Quand le printemps en fleurs a couronné ces arbres,  
 Les chants du rossignol hâtent-ils son réveil ?  
 Son sein gémirait-il pressé du poids des marbres,  
 L'écho du vieux torrent trouble-t-il son sommeil ?  
 Et quand Novembre au cyprès solitaire  
 Suspend la neige et nous glace d'effroi ;  
 Lorsque la pluie a pénétré la terre,  
 Sous son linceul se dit-elle : ' J'ai froid !'  
 Non : sa vie est encore errante en mille atomes . . .  
 Objet de mes chastes serments,  
 Tu n'as point revêtu la robe des fantômes,  
 Et tes restes encor me sont doux et charmants.  
 Vagues parfums, vous êtes son haleine ;  
 Balancements des flots, ses doux gémissements ;  
 Dans la vapeur qui borde la fontaine,  
 J'ai vu blanchir ses légers vêtements ;  
 Oh ! dites-moi, quand sur l'herbe fleurie  
 Glissent, le soir, les brises du printemps,  
 N'est-ce pas un accent de sa voix si chérie,  
 N'est-ce pas dans les bois ses soupirs que j'entends ?

Those who have found some of these accents in their life, though they should afterwards have uttered many a cry of anger and spite, may be forgiven much.

In some of his pieces M. de Latouche exhibits some flashes of fire and a strong feeling for physical beauty (see the elegy entitled *Apparition*). He has carried this feeling further than is permissible, even in an artist, in some of the lascivious elegies composing what he calls his *Stolen Pocket-book* (*Portefeuille volé*, 1845). I only mention this because it shows up another essential corner of his character and talent : this pretended democrat indeed delighted in the most refined aphrodisiacal paintings, both in prose and verse. We are beginning to have a complete picture of him from many points of view, as

a dainty, many-sided, restless, furtive, lascivious and fascinating mind.

We must come however to some of his mischievous tricks, which have been so much vaunted. One of the most innocent of them is the verse epistle which he addressed to our old friend M. Ulric Guttinguer, when that amiable poet one day asked M. de Latouche for his advice and perhaps for a preface to a collection of poems that he was about to publish (1824). M. de Latouche, with an air of deprecation, inserted an anodyne satire disguised in the form of an indulgent epistle, which ended with this line :

Inprimez-les, vos vers, et qu'on n'en parle plus.

This touch, by the way, was borrowed from an epigram of Millevoye,<sup>1</sup> who had himself borrowed it from I know not where. The double-edged epigram was printed at the beginning of M. Guttinguer's volume, and he at first accepted it in a friendly and favourable sense. The covert malice only came out on the great day of publication. Meanwhile, M. de Latouche rubbed his hands and triumphed.

A more serious trick was that which he played upon the *Constitutionnel* in July 1817. It was during the first Ministry of M. de Richelieu, and there was a Censure. M. de Latouche wrote criticisms of the paintings in the Salon for that paper ; in discussing a drawing of Isabey, he made a too direct allusion to the King of Rome. The Censor cancelled the passage ; Latouche returned to the office of the newspaper in the evening, to revise his article, and restored the passage without saying a word. I quote it here ; one must be very well informed in fact to see in it an allusion to the King of Rome and the tri-coloured emblem :

<sup>1</sup> Among the prettiest drawings of M. Isabey we remark the full-length figure of a child holding in both its hands an enor-

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<sup>1</sup> Millevoye's epigram was addressed to *A Reader of Society* ; here it is :

Vos vers tant lus, tant relus,  
Ont fait émeute au Parnasse ;  
Publiez-les donc, de grâce,  
Afin qu'on n'en parle plus.

mous bunch of roses. This association of the colours of the spring and the graces of childhood recalls and unites ideas of hope. In the middle of the bouquet the painter has thrown some pretty blue flowers: this combination has a most cheerful effect. The Germans call these flowers *Vergiss-mein-nicht*, *Forget-me-not* !'

The article appeared on the next day, the 16 July 1817, and the *Constitutionnel* was at once suppressed. It reappeared a few days after, with the help and under the cover of the *Journal de Commerce*. M. de Latouche laughed at his trick and rubbed his hands.

He played his most malignant tricks in the *Mercure du XIXe siècle*, of which he was the principal writer, on Vicomte Sosthène de La Rochefoucauld, his neighbour at Aulnay. That frank and chivalric man, who directed the fine arts and the Opera in a moral sense, was much pestered every week in the *Mercure*; he thought it a very simple matter to communicate with his good neighbour in the country, M. de Latouche, to ask him to conclude a peace or a truce. The conditions were agreed upon and signed, as that sort of treaty was signed at the time, with the insertion of a monetary clause. The ease with which it was done concealed a snare. With his ideas of honesty, Latouche thought he had saved the situation and reconciled probity with cunning, by giving to the sum received a patriotic application and announcing next day that M. de La Rochefoucauld had just sent his subscription in favour of the Greeks. He thought that when the matter was cleared up he would have the laughers on his side, and that the *bribing* Ministry would be well hissed. On this occasion even his friends thought that his conduct was beyond a joke and that his stratagem went outside the limits of good warfare.

The Vicomte de La Rochefoucauld was incurable in his trustfulness: after July 1830, he again communicated with his neighbour in the country, on the matter of a political pamphlet directed against Louis-Philippe, their common enemy. It is asserted that Latouche had the cunning to add to this pamphlet of M. de La Rochefoucauld a very mischievous page, which caused the latter to be condemned to several months of imprisonment. Latouche continued to laugh and rub his hands.

I will mention another trick of a more Machiavellian  
C.L.—V. N



combination. After the success of *Ouriha* and *Edouard*, the Duchesse de Duras had read, to a few ladies of her society, a tale called *Olivier*, which was spoken of with some little mystery. Those who heard it read know that this little novel, which was never published, was full of purity and delicacy; it could not be otherwise, since it was the work of Mme de Duras. The hero loved a young woman, was loved in return, and yet he left her, although she was free. Whence came this secret obstacle to Olivier's happiness, which made a union impossible? The final explanation which Mme de Duras gave on the last page of the novel was perfectly simple, and in accordance with the scruples of morality. But the mockers exercised their imaginations to find a solution. Among the first of them was M. de Latouche, who went so far as to write in secret a little novel which he published anonymously with the title *Olivier* (1826), and printed exactly like Mme de Duras' other novels. Many readers were taken in and said with astonishment: 'But is it possible that a person like Mme de Duras, a woman of the world and a woman, can have chosen such a subject? It is incredible, revolting . . .' Meanwhile M. de Latouche laughed again and rubbed his hands.

A strange man! In *Olivier Brusson* (1823) he published as his own a German tale of Hoffmann, and here we find him attributing his own *Olivier* to Mme de Duras. What a *chassé-croisé* of tricks!

Evidently this intellectual twist or eccentricity, of which I could mention many more examples, was natural in M. de Latouche, and he cultivated it with infinite art. M. Jal, one of his friends, often said to him: 'You are an incarnation of the devil'. That pleased him. When he was writing for a newspaper it was one of his greatest delights to bring in one of those covert insinuations, one of those *couleuvres* (snakes), as they are called, which are not discovered until after publication. He wrote only once for the doctrinaire *Globe*, about 1827, but he managed so well that this single little article caused a scandal; he had slipped into it all kinds of ironical insinuations on the subject of the famous taper of Maréchal Soult. Several of the writers on the staff of the paper, young men who frequented the salons and were in the habit of meeting the Marshal, openly expressed their indignation. But

M. de Latouche had gained his object, and laughed at the sensation he had caused.

I have no intention of extenuating or of exaggerating M. de Latouche's conduct in giving himself these little treats. I will only draw an inference that relates purely to literature and good taste. Be satirical if your heart desires it, if you feel in yourself the power, if you are carried away by indignation, but be so openly. Pierce your adversaries through and through as often as you please; I do not see that you can do anything better (from a literary point of view), if, I say again, your talent comes into play and serves you well. But why all those sarcasms which are filed away at leisure, which are covered over and blunted in the writing? 'His wit blunted the edge of its own sarcasms,' Janin said of him. 'The twists of his character pass into his style,' M. Deschamps said to me. Most of these little literary malignities of M. de Latouche, when he told them, appeared charming, exquisite, *adorable calumnies*; when written, they became cold, alembicated, obscure. He did not dare resolutely to throw his dart or his javelin; he did not dare to attack people face to face, and those who were the objects of his furtive attacks were hardly aware that they were being aimed at. Read again the famous article on *La Camaraderie littéraire* (*Revue de Paris*, October 1829), and say whether any good sense there may be in the general idea is not compromised and lost as it were in a tissue of cross allusions and inextricable personalities. His talent, even when he indulges in sarcasm, proceeds with a dark lantern in its hand.

The result of this oblique habit was that, even when not epigrammatical, he never approached a thing fairly and from the front; he never attacked a subject broadly or full face, whether a person or a thing.

His friends—and he had friends—did not escape his humours and sarcasms. Here is a touch that describes his character from its lightest and most harmless side. When the tragedy of his friend Guiraud, *Les Macchabées*, and that of his friend Soumet, *Cléopâtre* (two successes), were being performed, there where two scenes at which the pit always murmured, perhaps with reason. M. de Latouche always took care to enter the house during these scenes, to *deplore* the murmurs, and express surprise;

then he would vanish before the first plaudits which soon followed ; so that next day, when he saw his dear friend the author, he was justified in condoling with him and expressing his indignation at the injustice of that stupid public. Mme Sophie Gay, who at one time was very intimate with M. de Latouche, never called him anything else but *my intimate enemy*.

He wrote eight or nine novels, not more than two of which are now spoken of, *Fragoletta* (1829) and *La Correspondence de Clément XIV et de Carlin* (1827). *Fragoletta* is an impossible book to analyse ; it is the story of a hermaphrodite. One of M. de Latouche's friends had, in conversation, suggested to him the idea of a psychological novel on that theme. M. de Latouche hesitated and rejected the idea at first, but took it up some time after, and wrapped it up in what he called a political composition. 'I have put something of the sort into a political composition, yes, political ! he wrote to this friend in a letter that I have before me, and I will speak to you about it when we meet ; for I know that I was disagreeably astonished when I found in the preface to *Tribby* that somebody had robbed me of a subject without telling me. Here, the monstrosity is not such as you imagined it, and as it should not, I think, be painted'. In *Fragoletta*, in fact, the author affects to exhibit in the foreground the horrors of the revolution at Naples in 1798, the cruelties and the reactions of the populace and the Court after the evacuation by the French army ; but he describes with too much complacency the royal pleasures which he pretends to stigmatize. The novel of *Fragoletta* is crossed by tortuous, insidious scenes, which disturb the imagination and surprise the senses. I can only point out one commendable and really touching passage : it is where Major d'Hauteville, on his return from Italy, passes through his native district of Le Berry, and recognizes the river *Creuse*, so often celebrated since by Mme Sand, and to which M. de Latouche first called the attention of landscape-painters. After describing the varying characteristics of the country the river passes through, the novelist gives expression to one of those thoughts which are familiar to all, but that we are never tired of meeting again :

'There are very few people who can look without emotion

upon the place of their birth. Who is there that does not love to wander, even though he should have fallen from a higher fortune into a sad obscurity, round the little estate of which he was the young and proud possessor? And if it is unoccupied, his memories cling to it more freely. *There a window with its brown shutters, here the sunlight effects upon the glistening tiles after a shower, a path crossed by reeds, a tree dead except in its lower branches*, these are so many objects of emotion and memory. And if it is there that we had our first friend, if two hearts of seventeen opened together to the curiosity of travel and the charms of old stories when talking by the light of a fire of pine branches . . . !'

O poet, why did you not continue longer in this order of natural impressions? You were there at the sources of inspiration, of true consolation, of limpid poetry and of life. Why flee so quickly from those simple things that you felt in flashes, and entangle yourself at will in the twistings and turnings of your own paths?

The *Correspondence of Clement XIV and Carlino*, by M. de Latouche, was the outcome of a piquant idea of the Abbé Galiani. That witty Neapolitan, so fertile in improvisations and projects, wrote one day to Mme d'Épinay (15 February 1774):

'What you tell me about the old friendship between Carlino (the actor of the Comédie Italienne) and the Pope, has made me think, and a sublime idea has come into my head which you must by all means communicate to Marmontel from me, and try to electrify him. It might, I think, form the groundwork of the finest and the most sublime of novels in letter form. We will begin by supposing that these two schoolfellows, Carlino and Ganganelli, contracted the closest of friendships in their youth, that they have promised to write each other at least once every two years, and say how they are getting on. They keep their word, and write letters full of soul, of truth, of outpourings of the heart, *without any sarcasms*, without any coarse jests. These letters should exhibit the strange contrast of two men, one of whom has always been unhappy and, because he has been unhappy, has become Pope; the other, always happy, has remained a Harlequin. The most amusing part of it should be that Harlequin is always offering Ganganelli money, who is a poor monk, then a poor Cardinal, and lastly a not too well-off Pope. Harlequin should offer to use his influence at Court for the restitution of Avignon, and the Pope should thank him. My head is already so aflame with this work that I should write or dictate it in a fortnight if I had the power. I should insist upon the most exact truth or probability, *without any romantic episode* . . .'

That is where M. de Latouche, without any acknowledgment, got his first idea of the Correspondence, which he carried out, by the way, in a somewhat different spirit. He did not entirely avoid *romantic* episodes, for we cannot give any other name to the story of Jenny, the young Protestant girl who dies after falling in love with the monk Ganganelli. Nor has he been able to refrain from his familiar sarcasms and mockeries. In the letters which Carlino writes from Paris, it is not so much the actor of the Italian Comedy who is speaking, as M. de Latouche himself criticizing and ridiculing the literary coteries of 1826, and the time-honoured Alexandrian line: 'In France, writes Carlino, these long things to which some *Alexander* or other lent his name, always end in rhymes : they take the place of ideas'. All this portion of the book savours, at first sight, of the quarrel between the Classics and the Romantics, and a considerable part besides is devoted to the anti-Jesuitical controversies of the moment. In spite of all this, there are some happy, truly Italian things in the book ; the bits of landscape are well touched. When Carlino goes to Rome, just after Ganganelli's election to the papal chair, it is a delicate feeling that prevents the comedian from daring to present himself familiarly to his old friend, in spite of the latter's entreaties ; for this comedian is an Italian, he is a Catholic and devout ; he reveres, he almost worships in this friend whom he has just before familiarly addressed as 'thou,' the vicar of Jesus Christ on earth. Ganganelli urges him : 'I will ask thee a favour, he writes to him, which thou canst not refuse. On Monday I am obliged to go in pomp to Saint John Lateran. It is a ceremony which admits of no delay ; and, ill or well, on foot or in a litter, I shall appear in the procession. I wish to see thee. Place thyself at that window which we know so well, in the old house of the Brunettis, at the corner of the Via del Corso. When I see thee there I shall think myself back in the days of my youth. . . ' Poor Carlino does not fail to keep the holy appointment, and cannot find words in his next letter to express the various feelings which divided his heart at that great moment : 'What was my agitation at the sight of that majestic solemnity ! I could not have imagined that so much reverence could leave room for so much affection ; that one could love and worship the

same man'. And, recalling the moment of that solemn benediction, he exclaims in his pious ecstasy :

' Was I still on this earth when your eyes met mine, when your hands were stretched out towards me ? Then, on that terrace from which we have so often seen, side by side, other processions pass, I bowed my head all in tears. I received your blessing on my knees. When I dared to raise my eyes, yours were still upon me . . . and in *thy* eyes I saw a tear glisten.

' O that I had been able to catch it and to place it on the brow of my youngest child ! '

Here the writer of occasional pieces, the pamphleteer-novelist disappears, and the poet has entered into the truth of his subject. His fault lay in not being able to remain there for any length of time.

The rapid and somewhat ephemeral success of these *Letters of the Pope and Carlino* excited the author more than it satisfied him. During the whole of the Restoration period M. de Latouche sought in vain that great literary success, born of genius and the occasion, which crowns a brow with a wreath. He won many skirmish advantages, but not one victory. In his *Epistle to M. de Chateaubriand* (1824), he had called himself the *Peasant of the Vallée-aux-Loups* ; he acted the *peasant* as Paul-Louis Courier acted the *vine-dresser*. His friends humoured this whim, and expressed their approval and interest when he was near ; but he had too much wit not to know that this was only flattery mingled with esteem, and that all these praises together did not form a renown. He began to be terribly impatient that his turn had not come. When, about 1829, he saw new generations making their way and taking their rank in the camp of the innovators, in more advanced posts than he had reached, he became doubly impatient and his fits of anger were more frequent. When chatting about those literary matters which should engender only mildness, amenity and grace, he would burst out suddenly and without any apparent cause ; there were moments when his heart writhed under the sting. But his settled and permanent irascibility only dated from the day when his *Reine d'Espagne*, a comedy upon which, by a strange delusion, he had founded the greatest hopes, fell at the Théâtre-Français, on the 5 Novem-

ber 1831. After this defeat he felt that he was lost as an artist and that he would never have his day. He became implacable and full of resentment.

M. de Latouche was never more mistaken than when he thought that the assembled public would tolerate during five acts an erotic subject, serving as a vehicle for a hostile political intention. If the subject of a stage-play is indecent, which is sometimes the case, the execution should at least be gay and amusing. In this case everything was concerted, combined, calculated and distilled, in a word the very opposite of the comic talent. The author published his play with a Preface, in which he painfully accentuated his bitterness. He drew a very ironical and keenly satirical picture of the pit and boxes. Then he suddenly assumed a haughty tone and compared the fall of his play with that of Warsaw, and the behaviour of the public with that of the Emperor Nicolas. At the same time he quoted some letters of condolence that he had received in the morning. The patient applied every remedy he could think of to relieve the pain of his wound ; but this did not cure him.

Where will he find any one to pity, to understand him, if not among those who passionately love the same things which were the cause of his sufferings and his fall ? He had a love of Letters, of poetry ; though he spoke so ill of private successes enjoyed among friends, he yielded to them at once with complacency, with predilection. ' But successes of friendship (he admits somewhere in a moment of self-confession), make you dream of glory, that is to say of the approbation of the indifferent. The evil is born of every kind of ambition. In art, which is an end, you see a means, a means of fame, of publicity, I was about to say of prostitution. There ingratitude begins ; you demand of poetry a remuneration, something other than the happiness which the cultivation of it should give, you deserve to be, and you will be, punished '. He was punished, and his is one of the most painful examples that can be mentioned of the torments of the fettered, intelligent, impotent Prometheus in the literary order—a Prometheus who was unable to hand on the spark and created nothing.

He had some generosity, as I have said, even in his hatreds. At the moment of his greatest manœuvres

against his friends of the Romantic school, towards the end of 1829, M. Victor Hugo's *Marion De Lorme* having been stopped by the Censure, M. de Latouche suspended hostilities: 'What I wanted yesterday, my dear friend, he wrote to M. Jal, was to show you an article for the *Revue de Paris* which I have suppressed by reason of the position in which *Marion De Lorme* has been placed. I have substituted for it a half column for the *Constitutionnel* which you may read this morning. I think that we should always stand by one another against the Censure and the stupid enemies of poetry. Later I will resume my anger'.

In the July days of 1830 M. de Latouche showed himself a man of energy and courage. He arrived on the scene in time from his retreat at Aulnay; on the morning of Wednesday the 28th, he was with M. Évariste Dumoulin (the chief editor of the *Constitutionnel*), suggesting and supporting the firmest resolutions, and he was among those who did not back down during these difficult times. I have this fact, which does him credit, from one of the best informed witnesses.

After 1830 M. de Latouche was unable to moderate himself and did not know where to stop: the violence of his temper and his literary irritability, transported into politics, carried him, we may safely say, beyond his real opinions. He was at bottom but a Girondist, but, like every Girondist, he little calculated the effect of his attacks. As chief editor of the *Figaro* in 1831, he invented a thousand sarcasms, and every kind of sobriquet which it would be little to the purpose to repeat here. In order not to appear to deprive him of any credit, I will merely say that it was he who at that time coined the word *principicule*. What a trophy! By his political novels, by ambiguous prefaces, and even in his *Élegies*, he took a secret part in all the animosities of those eighteen years. Then, when the events of February 1848 broke out, he, with so many others, keenly felt the shock; he was mute, astonished and outstripped.

M. de Latouche was sincere in his patriotic and national feelings; but with regard to that extreme spirit of democracy into which he was thrown at the end by his literary misanthropy and disappointments, I will only put a single question: How can a man profess to believe



in the wisdom of the people, when he thinks he is so sure of their stupidity ?

Literarily speaking, he had only one piece of good fortune after 1830, but it was similar in nature to that which he enjoyed in 1819 when he introduced André Chénier. One day there arrived from Le Berry a young fellow-countrywoman, with eyes full of genius, and a brow shining with intelligence ; she came with a letter of introduction in her hand to ask his support : it was Mme Sand, who had not hitherto written anything, who had not yet adopted the name of *Sand*, and who was ingenuously unconscious of her genius. It is to the honour of M. de Latouche that he detected it at the very beginning, that he pointed out her true path and made her first steps easier. This second distinction ought to be counted almost equal to the first. It was always his lot to open to others the Promised Land, and never to enter it himself.

He had a terrible and cruel day in 1831 : it was the day when M. Gustave Planche published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (November) his article *On Literary Hatred*, of which M. de Latouche was the subject. In this cruel article he paid off an accumulated score of vengeance : it was quite an execution. Since that day M. de Latouche showed himself more cautious with new-comers ; he was particularly friendly to the young men of talent, Musset, Gautier, Hégésippe Moreau ; he even felt regrets and *repentance* for his past rancours ; but it was too late, his reputation was already too firmly established : the label remained.

I have touched upon more points than are necessary to draw a conclusion. The example of M. de Latouche provides us by contrast with a few teachings which it will not be superfluous to draw from it. It tells us how profitable and salutary it is to be perfectly simple, to be perfectly straightforward, to be satisfied with the condition and the proportion of talent that has fallen to our lot, to supplement it by degrees, to improve it to the best of our power, to apply it, to thank the Author of natural gifts for the distinction he has awarded us, even when this distinction is only of a subordinate degree. It tells us not to receive and harbour in our hearts those bitter passions which, once established there, obtain the mastery, rage

like furies, and corrupt the sweetest and most comforting thing in the world, which is recommended by sages as the sovereign remedy for ills, I mean the sincere love of Letters and the innocent charm of the Muses.

## LA GRANDE MADEMOISELLE

*Monday, March 24, 1851.*

ONE of the most original, the most singular and at the same time the most natural figures of the seventeenth century, is certainly La Grande Mademoiselle, the daughter of Gaston, the niece of Louis XIII and cousin-german of Louis XIV. There is, in every age, a certain fashionable type, a certain romantic phantasm which holds possession in people's imaginations and which floats, as it were, in the air. At the end of the reign of Louis XIII and the beginning of that of Louis XIV, this type and model was principally formed after Corneille's heroes and heroines, and also after those of Mlle de Scudéry. Mademoiselle, a person of imagination, of fancies and humours, but of little judgment, realized this type to a great extent in herself: she added to it all that was peculiar to the prejudices of her race and the superstitions of her birth. This made one of the oddest, the most vain-glorious and the least reasonable of compounds, which influenced her whole destiny. If for a time she held the sword like a warrior, she produced much with her pen in her hand: she left behind not only some interesting and very truthful Memoirs, of which somebody said 'that they are so badly written that we may be sure they are hers', but we also possess some little Novels, some Portraits and Letters of hers. In short, Mademoiselle was not only a very extraordinary princess, she was an authoress. As such we lay a claim to her: and it is right that we assign to her the place and date that she should occupy in the series of literary moods and varieties.

She was born at the Louvre, in May 1627. Having lost her mother (the Duchesse de Montpensier) at an early age, she was brought up by an estimable and pious governess, but with all the deference inspired by a granddaughter of

Henri IV. She naturally became accustomed to the idea of considering herself as being born of a different blood from the rest of humanity, even of noble humanity, and as walking on the same level with queens and kings. This idea, which was to her a religion, prompts her on every occasion to use words indicating a very frank and very naïve vanity, and inspire her with feelings that aim at greatness and which do not at least derogate from dignity. Her father, Gaston, Duke of Orleans, endowed with a thousand intellectual qualities, and not one of those which spring from the heart and the character, was the soul of all the political intrigues directed against Richelieu, and continually compromised his servants and friends, whom he afterwards abandoned. Mademoiselle, from her tenderest childhood, gave evidence of more pride and honour. Having witnessed at Fontainebleau the ceremony of the degradation of two knights of the Order (the Duc d'Elbœuf and the Marquis de La Vieuville), she asked the reason of it: they told her that it was because of their having followed Monsieur's party. She immediately began to weep and wished to retire, declaring that she could not witness this act with *propriety*. At a time when Richelieu was exercising dominion and 'when tyranny ruled so boldly, even over royal persons', she kept intact within her the cult and the proud idolatry of her own race. Her childhood, by the way, and her early youth were spent in frivolities, in a life made up entirely of ceremonials and diversions, in balls, plays, banquets, whilst she had nobody at her side to inform her that there was anything more serious to be done in the world. On one occasion she goes on a visit to the Abbey of Fontevault, the abbess of which was an aunt of hers, a natural daughter of Henri IV, and she begins to be bored from the very first moment. But the girls in her train discover a mad nun shut up in a dungeon: quickly they call Mademoiselle to amuse her with the sight of her antics: 'I turned my steps to the dungeon, she says, and did not leave it until it was time to sup'. On the next day the abbess, seeing how she had enjoyed herself, *treated her to a second mad nun*: 'As there was not another one for the third day, she adds pleasantly, I was bored; I took my departure in spite of my aunt's entreaties'. This is the tone in which human miseries are treated, and by one who was kind at heart,

but who had nobody, we say again, to advise and enlighten her. When the Fronde comes, it is the same. Mademoiselle sees in it at first only a subject for curiosity and diversion: 'Everything new amused me . . . However important an affair might be, provided that it contributed to my diversion, I thought of nothing else the whole evening'. Such was Mademoiselle at ten years of age, such she was at twenty, such at thirty, such she will be all her life, until a tardy passion taught her to suffer.

The first pages of her Memoirs are filled with only external details. She took part in Louis XIII's hunting parties, at the time of that prince's amours with Mme de Hautefort. Enumerating all the young ladies she had in her own train: 'We were all dressed in colour, she says, on handsome richly-caparisoned hackneys; and, to protect us from the sun, we each had a hat trimmed with quantities of feathers'. That already gives us a picture of her, proud and of haughty mien, tall for her age, having preserved all the plumes of her grandfather Henri IV's panache. What matters it that Mademoiselle is at this epoch only ten years of age? her mind always remained at this age in many respects, and did not mature. Even at that time they spoke to her of settling her in life, of marrying her, either with the King, with the Cardinal-Infante, the Queen's brother, or with the Comte de Soissons; they did this for her amusement. For more than thirty years they will go on entertainng her with these sort of never-ending plans; she will continually speak of them herself, but like a child, without ever being able to make up her mind, without ever perceiving that this eternal indecision is becoming a fable. She who was called *Mademoiselle* par excellence could not decide to renounce the title, and this continued until the moment when nature, so long deferred, resumed her rights and spoke once for all to her heart. But we have not yet reached that time.

Meanwhile she showed early signs of intellectual tastes, of the fine and delicate wit that comes out in conversation; her father excelled in it: she relates how at Tours, every evening, she loved to hear Monsieur entertaining her with accounts of all his past adventures, 'and that very agreeably, like a man of the world who spoke well and with the greatest charm and natural facility'. It is rare to see

a child so sensible to this kind of charm. In some letters to Mme de Motteville, written in 1660, Mademoiselle speaks to her of *conversation* as being, 'in your opinion and mine the greatest pleasure in life, and almost the only one to my liking'. It was on that account as much as by his gentlemanly air, it was by the charm of his conversation, that Lauzun at first insinuated himself into her good graces: 'I found that he had a manner of expressing himself which I found in no others'.

Richelieu being dead, Gaston, whose last plottings had caused his removal from the scene, made his reconciliation with the Court; he returned to Paris and dismounted at his daughter's. 'He supped at my house, and we had the twenty-four fiddles, says Mademoiselle; he was as gay as if MM. de Cinq-Mars and de Thou had not been left to their fate. I confess that I could not see him without thinking of them, and that, though I myself rejoiced, I felt that his joy grieved me'. Mademoiselle's good qualities are already showing through: in spite of her race prejudices she had humanity, fidelity to her friends in their divers fortunes, and dignity. Her father laughed at her more than once for her heroic and chivalric pretensions, but she was better than he.

The time between the death of Louis XIII and the Fronde (1643-1648) was a brilliant moment for Mademoiselle. She was between sixteen and twenty years of age, and she shone in the first rank at Court, in all the pride of her hopes. There was no alliance that she did not seem worthy of. Anything but amorous by disposition, or given to coquetry, she exhibited a coolness which was long compared with that of the virgin *Pallas*, and she saw in marriage only an occasion for playing a fine part and for a glorious destiny, and romantic as she was, she loved the flattering idea of it almost as much as the accomplishment. Should she marry the young King Louis XIV, who was eleven years her junior, and become Queen of France? should she become Queen of England by marrying the Prince of Wales, who was then in exile, but who could not fail to be restored some day? or should she be Empress by marrying the Emperor of Germany, who had become a widower shortly before? It seemed as if she had but to choose, and it would be impossible to exhibit one's lofty fancies with more *naïveté* than she does herself on the

occasion of a grand fête which took place at the Palais-Royal towards the end of the winter of 1646, and for which the Queen-mother insisted on dressing her :

‘ They were three whole days adjusting my dress ; my robe was all studded with diamonds, with carnation, white and black tassels ; I had upon my person all the stones of the Crown and of the Queen of England, who still had a few left at this time. One could not see anything finer or more magnificent than I was on that day, and there was no lack of people to tell me, rightly enough, that my handsome figure, my good looks, my white complexion and the splendour of my fair hair adorned me no less than all the wealth that shone on my person ’.

They danced on a large illuminated stage ; in the middle of the background there was a throne raised three steps and surmounted by a canopy :

‘ Neither the King (Louis XIV) nor the Prince of Wales (afterwards Charles II) would sit on this throne ; I alone sat on it, so that I saw at my feet those two princes and all the princesses of the Court. I felt by no means embarrassed in this position . . . Everybody told me that I had never appeared less constrained than on that throne, and that, as I was of a race to occupy it, when I was in possession of one that I should occupy longer than at a ball, I should do so with even more freedom. While I was seated there with the prince at my feet, *my heart looked down upon him* as well as my eyes ; I had it in my mind at that time to marry the Emperor . . . I only regarded the Prince of Wales as an object of pity ’.

There we have this romantic princess who said everything about herself naturally, sincerely, with a sort of bravura in her sincerity, and with a frankness which at times appears hearty even in her pride.

This beauty to which she is the first to do such great justice was in fact real in that age of her first youth. Brilliancy, a freshness

Qui conservait des Lis la candide innocence,

as the poets said, handsome eyes, fair hair *of a fine ash-colour*, a handsome figure, all this covered any lack in the direction of delicacy and grace ; ‘ she had quite the air of a great beauty ’, as Mme de Motteville acknowledges. Her teeth, however, which were not beautiful, and her large aquiline nose, betrayed faults which were

common enough in the race of the Bourbons. Years gave more stiffness to her features and her form, without taking from her that quickness and petulance which never permitted her any gravity.

When the Fronde broke out, and the good sense contained in every head was put to the rudest proofs in this sudden civil tempest, Mademoiselle was already known for the impetuosities and caprices of her temper which sometimes crossed and got the better of her own feelings, to the extent of prejudicing her fortune and the consideration in which she was held. She had not yet been able to decide upon the choice of a husband, and, in her desire for a crown, she allowed what offered and was in her grasp to escape her, with a view to distant impossibilities. She was on particularly bad terms with the Queen and Cardinal Mazarin, and as little disposed to be prudent and sensible in these incipient disturbances as any other person at Court. The first Fronde, that of 1648, did not yet furnish her with an occasion to emancipate herself, and her spirit confined itself to venting her prejudices, which she took no pains to conceal: 'As I was not very well satisfied either with the Queen or with Monsieur at that time, it was a great pleasure to me, she says, to see them in difficulties'. When the Queen and the Court, on the advice of the Cardinal, quitted Paris for Saint-Germain in the night of the 6 January 1649, she thought herself in duty bound to accompany them, though she was far from sharing their thoughts and views: 'I was quite disturbed with joy to see that they were about to make a mistake, and to be a spectator of the miseries it would cause them: that avenged me a little for the persecutions I had suffered'. The levity, the disorder and the bustle of that Court of Saint-Germain are delightfully described by a lady who was as light and frivolous as any, but who is truthful and outspoken. Mademoiselle had occasion for great self-satisfaction during this sojourn: 'The people of Paris, she says, have always loved me, because I was born and brought up there: that has given them a respect for me and a greater inclination than they ordinarily have for persons of *my quality*'. The result of this exception of the Parisians in her favour was that they allowed her carriages to leave for Saint-Germain, and that, whilst the Queen and the King lacked everything, she had all she desired



and wanted nothing. All this was but a prelude to the part she was to play in the second Fronde: 'I did not then foresee, she says, that I should be one of a considerable party, in which I should be able to do my duty and take my revenge at the same time; however, in exercising this sort of vengeance, we indeed injure ourselves'.

This little word of final repentance does not prevent Mademoiselle from being very proud and very vain of what she did in 1652, when she was able at once to obey her father's orders and follow her adventurous instincts. At this second epoch she was twenty-five years of age, the prime of life for an amazon. That idea of marriage, which was always dangling in prospect before her eyes, suggested at that time a possible union, either with the Prince de Condé in case he should become a widower (this sort of supposition did not repel her), or with the King himself, if she made herself necessary and formidable. Meanwhile she obeyed without much consistency her romantic and high-flying inclinations, and, passing from her old aversion for the Prince de Condé to a sudden friendship, she burned to distinguish herself in the common cause by some signal service. An occasion offered itself. Her father, Monsieur, was at Paris, which he thought he could not leave without serious inconvenience. His presence was also needed at Orleans, which was part of his appanage, and where a considerable party was ready to open the gates to the royal army, which was advancing from the direction of Blois. It became of the highest importance that this city of Orleans should remain faithful to the Fronde, otherwise the whole line of the Loire would be cut off, and the Prince de Condé, who was coming from Guyenne, would find the enemy in mastery of the positions. Mademoiselle offered to go in person to Orleans and to hold the city. Her father distrusted her and her reason: 'This would be a ridiculous piece of chivalry, he said on the day of her departure, if she were not supported by the good sense of Mmes de Fiesque and de Frontenac'. Those were the two ladies who accompanied Mademoiselle, and who were called, half by courtesy and half in mockery, her *maréchaux de camp*. Mademoiselle departed then, in the joy of her heart at finding herself at last in a good way to do some extraordinary action and win some glory. An astrologer had pre-

dicted it on the morning of her departure, and she had no doubt that he was right. As soon as she was in the plains of Beauce, she mounted her horse, and placed herself at the head of the army of the Fronde, which was in the neighbourhood; a council of war was held in her presence, and it was decided that nothing should henceforth be done except by her orders. The difficulty was to enter Orleans: for, hemmed in on the one side by the summons of Molé, the Keeper of the Seal, in the name of the King, and by that of the Fronde on the other, Messieurs of the Hôtel-de-Ville had a good mind to remain neutral. Impatient of the long-drawn-out parleys, Mademoiselle walked in front of the ramparts, inciting the people within by her gestures and words; then, seeing that she must count more on the little people than on the big burghers, she leapt into a boat which some boatmen offered her, broke down a badly-guarded gate which opened upon the quay, and at which she was not expected: when two panels had been broken, she was passed through the opening, and there she was inside the city, followed at a distance by her ladies who took the same road, carried in triumph by the people, and in a twinkling she was mistress of the place: 'For, when persons of my quality are in a place, she said to the rather astonished governor and aldermen, they are the mistresses, and with justice enough: I should be the mistress in this town, since it belongs to Monsieur. —They paid me their respects, rather frightened . . . Arrived at my residence, I received the harangues of all the Corporations and the honours which were my due, as at any other time'. Not content with being harangued, she improvises a speech in the very Town Hall itself, and acquits herself no worse than many an orator and tribune in a similar crisis.

These first days were the finest. It was inevitable that Mademoiselle should be compared to the Maid of Orleans. The Queen of England, whose son had been dismissed as a suitor, said ironically 'that it was only right that she should save Orleans like the Maid, having begun by driving out the English'. The Prince de Condé, who had left Agen incognito and disguised, in the meanwhile happily joined the army which was near Orleans. He wrote a letter to Mademoiselle to thank her and to congratulate her on her prowess: 'Only you could have carried out

such a stroke, he wrote, which is of the highest importance'. When he was informed that she had assisted at a Council of War and had given her opinion : ' M. le Prince said that the resolutions adopted at a Council at which I had consented to be present should be followed, even though they should not be good, but that those which had been adopted were such that the King of Sweden (Gustavus Adolphus !) could not have improved upon, and that he would have acted in the same way though I had not ordered it'. Mademoiselle seriously accepts and repeats all these eulogies. When shortly after she returned to Paris, the whole people came out to meet her ; she was the heroine of the moment. The Prince de Condé gave her to understand that he desired nothing so passionately as to see her Queen of France, and that no settlement should be come to that did not include her. In her credulous exaltation, she was in the most brilliant hour of her life.

Reverses were not long in coming, and she valiantly took her share of them. A stranger to intrigues and incapable of politics, the affairs of the Fronde were already in full dissolution and negotiations were begun on all sides, without her being aware of it. On the 2 July 1652, the day of the bloody combat of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, when the Prince de Condé, after doing prodigies of valour, would have been crushed with all his troops by Turenne, if Paris had not opened its gates to his exhausted army, it was Mademoiselle who, wresting his consent from Monsieur, already half a traitor, went to the Hôtel-de-Ville, and forced the ill-will of the undecided and the neutrals. To the Maréchal de L'Hôpital, who resisted to the best of his power, she uttered these noble words : ' Reflect, Sir, that, while you are wasting time in disputes over useless things, M. le Prince is in peril in your suburbs. What a grief it would be and what an everlasting shame to Paris, if he perished for want of succour ! You can lend him assistance, do so as soon as possible '. It is added that she said besides to the Maréchal, if he did not hasten, ' that she would pull out his beard and that he should die at her hands '. Hastening to the Bastille with full powers, she picked up the wounded on the way, almost all men of mark whom she recognized with pity. She paints with expressive touches the moment when she meets M. le Prince in one of the intervals of the action :

‘ He was in a pitiable state, he had an inch of dust on his face, and his hair was all entangled ; his collar and shirt were covered with blood, though he was not wounded ; his cuirass was full of dents, and he held his naked sword in his hand, having lost the scabbard ; he gave it to my squire. He said to me : “ You see a man in despair, I have lost all my friends ; Messieurs de Nemours, de La Rochefoucauld and Clinchamp are mortally wounded.” I assured him that they were in a better condition than he thought . . . That cheered him a little ; he was greatly afflicted ; when he entered, he threw himself upon a chair, he wept and said to me : “ Pardon the grief I am in.” After that, let anybody say that he loves nothing ; for my part, I have always known him affectionate to his friends and those he loved ’.

It may be remarked, on this occasion, that Condé loved and mourned as a warrior the friends he might otherwise have seen die without perhaps regretting them. On the day of a battle he recovered all his qualities, his humanity, all his virtues ; he was in his element, and, like all great hearts on those occasions, he was good.

On that day Mademoiselle fired a few volleys of cannon from the Bastille which left no room for doubt about the attitude of Paris, and showed the King’s troops that the hour was not yet come for entering that city. Mazarin said that these cannon shots fired by Mademoiselle’s orders had killed her husband, meaning that she could henceforth no more aspire to marry the King. It is doubtful whether she would ever have married him. On that day of the Bastille, however, she had the satisfaction of having acted, not rashly and impetuously as at Orleans, but courageously and humanely. She blushed for her father’s prolonged indecision out of which he had to be dragged ; she tried to excuse him as best she could, and to save him from the disgrace of not having mounted into the saddle at once : she had had enough courage for the two of them.

On a third occasion she again supplied his place. Two days after (4 July), on the occasion of the massacre of the Hôtel-de-Ville, with which the Prince de Condé paid the Parisians so lamentably for his welcome, and which Gaston, according to his wont, favoured at least by his inaction, Mademoiselle offered to go and save those who were being massacred and to cry *stop!* to the populace. Starting from the Luxembourg, she was unable the first time to penetrate beyond the Hôtel-Dieu ; she was more

fortunate at a second attempt, and was able to reach the Hôtel-de-Ville very late, much too late, soon enough however to do some act of protection and humanity.

The Fronde was at the end of its resources and everybody was making his peace. The rumour was current that Gaston had made his terms with the Court, by separating his interests from those of the Prince de Condé. The President Viole spoke of it to Mademoiselle, who was reduced to saying: '*You know him, I cannot answer for his actions*'. When she called on this faint-hearted father to know if he indeed had orders to quit the Luxembourg, and what she was to do herself, he said that he did not meddle with things that concerned her, and he disclaimed all that she had done in his name. 'I suppose you believe, Mademoiselle, he resumed with that contemptuous and cowardly irony which was familiar to him, that the affair of Saint-Antoine has not injured you at Court? You were very glad to play the heroine, and to be told that you were the heroine of our party; that you twice saved it. Whatever may happen to you, you will find comfort in the memory of the praises which have been given you'. She replied with pride and dignity: 'I do not believe I served you any worse at the Porte Saint-Antoine than I did at Orleans. These two actions that you reproach me with so strongly I did by your orders; if they were to be done over again, I would do them, because my duty would oblige me to . . . It is better to have done what I have done than to repent of having done nothing. *I do not know what you mean by being a heroine: I am of a birth never to do any but great and elevated actions. You may call that what you please; I call it following my inclination and going my own way; I was not born to follow another's inclination*'.

We feel at once that there is some magniloquence and boastfulness in these words, but we must recognize in them also a sort of echo of the *Cid* and certain accents of Corneille. Mademoiselle, during the Fronde, was enamoured of a false grandeur, she pursued a false glory: she remained disinterested at least, and generous, and left no stain on her name.

In the years that followed she had to win the King's pardon, and she succeeded in the end. During the rather forced retreats she had to make to the estates of her appanages, she took a liking to Letters and intellectual

pursuits. She began to write her Memoirs. Among her gentlemen and domestics was the poet Segrais. Through him she made acquaintance with Huet (the future bishop), who, a young man at that time, sometimes acted as her reader during her toilette. She was above all fond of romances. She wrote one or two at this period (1658), as well as some society Portraits, the fashion of which had just been introduced. She had a whole volume of them printed at Caen (1659), with the assistance of Huet, and in a small number of copies: most of these Portraits were by her. In a word, she carried on literature as she had carried on civil war and played the amazon, at a venture, heedlessly, in an offhand way, and not without some wit.

We find her again in the spring of 1660, attending the Court during the Conferences of the Peace of the Pyrenees, still giving the rein to her imagination, not under the heroic but under the pastoral form. One day at Saint-Jean-de-Luz, when with Mme de Motteville she was admiring the beauty of the landscape from a window of Cardinal Mazarin's room, Mademoiselle began to imagine a plan of retreat and solitude, and to moralize on the happy life it would afford. On leaving, full of her object, she wrote a long letter to Mme de Motteville, who replied in her turn. This rather pleasing correspondence serves very well to mark a moment in French literature; it represents and characterizes the Spanish pastoral nuance which reigned between d'Urfé's romance and those of Mlle de Scudéry, and to which the good sense of Louis XIV, aided by Boileau, was to put an end.

Mademoiselle pictures to herself, in a meadow beside a forest, in sight of the sea, a company of both sexes, entirely composed of amiable and perfect, delicate and simple people, who guard their sheep on sunshiny days and for their pleasure, and pay visits the rest of the time, going from one hermitage to another in chairs, calashes and coaches; who play the lute and the harpsichord, read poetry and new works; who unite the advantages of civilized life with the freedom of rustic life, without forgetting the virtues of the Christian life; who, all celibates or widowed, polite without gallantry or at least without love, live virtuously together, and feel no need to have recourse to the vulgar remedy of marriage. Observe

that at a few yards distance in the forest is a convent of Carmelites, whither they will not fail to go from time to time for their edification : for, whilst leading this pleasant and tranquil life, they must not forget their salvation. Mme de Motteville, in replying to Mademoiselle with all sorts of compliments, calling her by turns *illustrious princess* and *fair Amelinle*, indulges in a sly mockery on that article of matrimonial interdiction which was the chief point of the new Pastoral Code, and she tries to introduce a little reality, a little good sense, into the picture of this republic that is at once gallant, platonic and Christian. She points out that, as it is difficult entirely to suppress gallantry and love, it would still be perhaps the best thing to return to *that so common error which an old custom has rendered legitimate, and which is called marriage*. Thereupon the two sides of the question are debated, and Mademoiselle, in this discussion, gives evidence of a rather refined and distinguished, at times even elevated, romantic spirit ; but everywhere, here as in the Fronde movement, it is the sense of reality, it is good sense and balance that are lacking.

I will not follow her through her divers compositions and literary rhapsodies (Portraits, society Novels), and I will come to the great event of her life, in order to complete her picture. Mademoiselle was forty-two years of age ; she had missed so many and such great matches, that there seemed nothing left to her but to remain in that state of independence and freedom as the richest princess in France, when she began (1669) to notice M. de Lauzun, a favourite of the King, and several years younger than herself. After remaining cold and pure, and never having loved hitherto, she experienced the feeling of love for the first time with an extreme youth, nay, a childhood of the heart ; she describes it all with the artlessness of a shepherdess. One day then she perceived that this little man, a Captain of the Guards, a Gascon of proud mien, with a witty and ironical tone, had a something indescribable that she had not yet remarked in anybody else. The first time that he was on service as Captain of the Guards and *took the bâton*, as they used to say, ' he did his functions with a grand and easy air, full of attentions without any apparent eagerness. When I complimented him, she tells us, he said he was very sensible of the honour I did him in joining

in the favours that the King had shown him'. These simple words carry her away: 'I began at that time to regard him as an *extraordinary* man, very agreeable in conversation, and I very readily sought opportunities to speak with him'. She began to have a vague feeling of tedium whenever she did not see him: 'This winter, she says (1669), without exactly knowing why, I could neither bear Paris nor leave Saint-Germain'. Every day she discovered in him more wit and charm when she succeeded in conversing with him in some window recess, which was not always easy by reason of etiquette and rank. When she once held him, she was for hours oblivious to everything else. She delighted in discovering in him all sorts of distinctions, an elevation of soul above the common, and a *million singularities* which charmed her. After reflecting for some time, she was not long in firmly making up her mind, and, as she was very honest and very impulsive, as the idea never entered into her mind that one could love without marrying, it seemed to her that the shortest way out of the difficulty was to raise the nobleman in rank and to marry him. The difficulty was to make him understand it, for the respect behind which Lauzun retrenched himself allowed of no access. It has been remarked 'that in friendship as in love, princesses are condemned to make the first advances, and that the deference by which they are surrounded often obliges the proudest and the most modest to make overtures which other women would not permit themselves'. Mademoiselle was thus obliged to take all the steps. Lauzun's artifice with her consisted in increasing, in raising still higher the barriers of respect which were already so high, in cunningly retrenching and concealing himself behind them. It was nothing but deep bows, endless assurances of submission, but he lent a deaf ear to every tender word; and not only he, but Baraille, an officer of his company, who was his man of confidence, did the same: 'Every time that I met him (Baraille), I saluted him, says Mademoiselle, in order to encourage him to approach; he always pretended to think that it was some other person I was addressing, and he would meanwhile make me a deep bow from one side, and retire from the other: which drove me to despair'. Those were Lauzun's watchword and tactics. If Mademoiselle had had no idea of marriage, he



would have led and forced her to it by his conduct, so careful was he not to lend himself to any simply tender or gallant overture. The lady-killer had suddenly become a man of principles; he acted the chaste and the virtuous to get himself married. Poor Mademoiselle, inexperienced as a schoolgirl and without a confidant, could discover no method of informing this vain coxcomb of what he saw only too clearly. She sent for Corneille's Works and read them again to find in them some reflections of her destiny and to learn some lessons; she counted on the secret sympathy of souls:

Quand les ordres du Ciel nous ont faits l'un pour l'autre,  
Lise, c'est un accord bientôt fait que le nôtre. . .  
On s'estime, on se cherche, on s'aime en un moment;  
Tout ce qu'on s'entredit persuade aisément.

This persuasion was the difficult point with Lauzun. She pretended to consult him upon the marriages that were proposed to her, hoping ever that he would declare himself and furnish her with an opportunity to reply with her own confession. But Lauzun was strictly, cruelly respectful; he was extravagantly so. Nothing but homage, never an insult! She had appointed him, almost in spite of himself, her adviser, her confidant: she desired to marry, she told him, she had decided to marry a Frenchman, to make the fortune of some deserving man, and to live with this honourable man and friend in perfect esteem, a life of peace and tranquillity. It was only a question of finding one who was worthy of the choice. Lauzun would talk long with her; he weighed the advantages and the disadvantages of this match, taking good care not to appear to guess that he was the man in question. There were days however when one might think that he was beginning to understand; but he always escaped in time 'by respectful manners which were full of intelligence', which inflamed the poor Princess in the highest degree.

She burned like Dido, like Medea, like Ariadne, but twenty years too late. She did things which might have appeared charming in a quite young girl: during a journey to Flanders one horribly rainy day, M. de Lauzun being in command as General, as he frequently approached the King's carriage bare-headed and with his hat in his hand, Mademoiselle could not contain herself and said to

the King: 'Make him put on his hat'! At Saint-Germain, where the Court was, when she was for the hundredth time on the point of naming to Lauzun the person she had chosen to make her happy, and upon whom she was continually consulting him, she had yet not the strength to articulate the name: 'If I had an ink-stand and paper, I would write it', she said to him; and pointing to a mirror that was at her side: 'I should like to breathe upon it, and write the name in big letters, in order that you might read it'.

What is remarkable in this affair and significant of the period, is that the idea of the King, that cult and official idolatry which was paid to him, was mixed up with this whole affair. It was in the name of the King, and under his invocation as it were, that they love and in the end confess their love. 'The King has always been and still is *my first passion*, M. de Lauzun *the second*', said Mademoiselle; and M. de Lauzun, on his side, flattered himself that he had definitely gained Mademoiselle's love and touched her heart only by reason of the respect and the real *tenderness* he had for the person of the King. At the moment when the marriage is fixed, we see him above all eager to stipulate that he shall not leave the King for a single moment, that he shall continue as before to do all the duties of his office, that he shall be the last at the *coucher* and the first at the *lever*. He quite intends to continue to sleep at the Louvre. The first use he proposes to make of Mademoiselle's immense riches, is to set up, as Captain, his whole company on a new footing, in order to *pay his court with it*. That idea alone is his whole *honey-moon*. In her letter to the King in which she asks permission to marry Lauzun, Mademoiselle is careful to make this chain of precious servitude and domesticity to ring very clearly, which, she thinks, is the greatest honour of all, and in which she claims her share: 'I say all this to Your Majesty in order to show you that the more exalted we are *the more worthy are we to be your domestics*'. There was something to which Lauzun attached a still higher value than being the husband of Mademoiselle, the Duc de Montpensier and the greatest lord in the kingdom, that was to be on the best of terms with his master.—I expressly note the prevailing form of platitude at that time: \*let us not flatter ourselves that we have not ours.

The sequel is well known. Louis XIV at first permitted the marriage, but they were wrong in not taking advantage of the permission during the twenty-four hours, and in giving him time to reflect. The marriage, decided on the day, or two days, before, was declared on Monday the 15 December (1670), and held until Thursday the 18th. The King abruptly withdrew his permission. Mademoiselle was in a state that we may imagine, but she dared not yet blaspheme against the King. Lauzun received the blow like an accomplished courtier and as if he had said: 'The King has given, the King has taken away, I have but to thank and to bless him'. For a moment he even appeared on the point of rising in favour. However, from reasons which have remained obscure, but which were connected with this great affair, he was arrested about a year after (25 November 1671), and imprisoned in the Château of Pignerol. His imprisonment lasted no less than ten years. During all this time Mademoiselle had no thoughts but for him; she did everything to obtain his deliverance, and bought it at the price of the immense property which Mme de Montespan extracted from her as a gift in favour of her son, the Duc du Maine, the King's bastard. She submitted to everything they pleased in order to see again the man she loved. She was ill rewarded. When Lauzun came out of prison, he was no longer the gallant, polished gentleman who had charmed her so: the courtier alone had survived, the inveterate courtier, who never rested until he had patched up a peace and regained his footing with the master; in other respects hard, openly self-interested, avaricious, presuming to reproach Mademoiselle for the very sacrifices she had made for his deliverance. The captivity had brought out all the defects of character and heart which he had known how to conceal in his fine days. Marriage too (for it appears that a secret marriage really took place then) henceforth dispensed him from any constraint.

Mademoiselle knew life late, still she did know it in the end, and she too passed through every kind of trial; she knew the slow suffering which wears out love in a heart, the contempt and indignation which break it, and she arrived at that final state of indifference which finds no remedy and comfort but in God. It is a sad day when we discover that that somebody whom we once delighted

in adorning with all the <sup>†</sup>perfections and overwhelming with all gifts is *such a nonentity*. She had years to meditate over this bitter discovery. She died in March 1693, at the age of sixty-six.

Her obsequies even, celebrated with magnificence, were disturbed by a singular accident. The urn which contained her embalmed, and insufficiently embalmed, entrails, burst in the middle of the ceremony with a terrible noise, which created a panic terror among the bystanders. It was decreed that everything relating to Mademoiselle should be attended with something ridiculous, even her funeral.

What is lacking in her life, in her character as well as in her mind, is good taste, grace, justness, which is precisely what ought to mark the fine epoch of Louis XIV. With her ten years seniority of the King, Mademoiselle was always a little behind the age, and belonged to the old Court. By the turn of her imagination she belongs to the literature of the end of Louis XIII and the Regency, to the literature of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, which was not influenced by the reforms of Boileau and Mme de La Fayette. There is something promiscuous in her admirations: she has a great appreciation of Corneille, she has *Le Tartufe* played on her private stage, but she also receives the Abbé Cotin: 'I love poetry, of whatever nature it may be', she says. Above all she loves grandeur, she loves glory; she often mistakes it; she is moved however by feelings of pride, honour and goodness, worthy of her race. On the days when she is at her best, she shows the proximity of Corneille. Her conduct at the combat of Saint-Antoine must be placed to her credit. Her *Memoirs* too are a most durable title to fame, they are veracious and faithful *Memoirs*, in which she tells everything about herself and others, naïvely, proudly, and as her mind prompts her. The people of good sense who read them, and who enjoy, as a lost singularity, so many incredible confessions and so *princely* a way of looking at all things, may without any effort supply the reflections and the moral which she fails to find.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since the above was written, there has appeared a new edition, and the first quite correct one, of the *Memoirs* of Mademoiselle (Charpentier, 1858), prepared by M. Chéruel from the autograph manuscript in the Imperial Library. The modern editors (Petitot, Michaud) had neglected to

consult this manuscript, and they continued to reprint the old editions in which the text had been touched up, and which contained inaccuracies of proper names and a few omissions. All this has now been made good.—The Abbé Terrasson said of a Jansenist translation of the Bible 'that it contained the scandal of the text in all its purity'. We may equally say of the good edition of the *Memoirs* of Mademoiselle that her style is there restored in all the purity of its natural incorrectness.

## M. THÉODORE LECLERCQ

*Monday, March 31, 1851.\**

M. THÉODORE LECLERCQ died on the 15 February last, and this death suddenly awakened, among those who knew this witty author only through his Works, the vivid recollection of quite a piquant chapter of literary history, of a whole chapter of manners under the Restoration. M. Théodore Leclercq had the singular good fortune for a moralizing and dramatic writer, of having connected his observation and his delicate mockery with a distinct epoch and a moment in history : so much so that, in order to obtain an understanding of those things which the historian only cursorily touches upon and can only note without describing, one could do no better than refer to some of his pretty Proverbs for documentary evidence. No doubt these Proverbs themselves might need a few comments here and there, but they are above all things a living commentary in themselves and a spirited explanation of the pretensions and the absurdities of an epoch : they are what I should call amusing and true illustrations of history. Let us try to define that moment to which the *Dramatic Proverbs* of M. Théodore Leclercq relate—1820—1830.

The Restoration was established in 1814, and, however reasonable might be the regrets, and however burning the pain, of those who suffered by the reverses of our arms and the occupation of our country, there can be no doubt that matters had come to such a crisis that the Restoration, though it was neither desired nor foreseen by France, was accepted by a great number of people, at this first hour of 1814, as a relief. To make this new régime a living thing, it was only necessary to give it a good start on its way and to direct it properly. But the mistakes began from the very first day, and the want of intelligence

became manifest to all eyes. The events of 1815 and the Hundred Days were at once the warning and the chastisement. From that moment civil passions became inflamed, and an incurable irritation, which was openly shown on both sides, put off any hope of a moderate solution, and of reasonable measures. Reason seldom comes to nations and masses of people except through necessity, through exhaustion, when, after much suffering, it is felt that, to put an end to it, the only course is for each side to make concessions and to come to terms. This exhaustion of the nation was real and greatly felt in 1814, a physical rather than a moral exhaustion, which was but the result of a too abundant loss of blood. France quickly recovers from such states. The anger and fury aroused by the events of 1815 produced a fresh fever which kindled the brain, and the fatigue was forgotten; the parties again came in conflict as if there had not already been a complete circle of revolutions. The better sort of heads, which should have taken a juster view of things, were drawn, after 1815, into passionate opinions. For nearly five years the Government struggled between the two extreme parties, and tried with more or less skill to steer a middle course which led nowhere. The *ultra* party encroached upon the power in 1820, and from that time never yielded a foot until it had obtained absolute mastery. This party, which comprised the political group and the religious group, had the advantage of being organized and combined, and left no resources untried. If to-day we put aside, in order to judge that party, every prejudice and all personal recollection as it were, we cannot help seeing at least that they misunderstood on essential points the spirit of the time, even the spirit of the nation, and that they wounded French susceptibilities. Hence the war to the death which soon commenced between the party and all sensible spirits which were not blinded by direct and narrow interests. A good number of those who had been carried away in 1815 then returned and felt themselves driven to contrary opinions. From 1821 to 1828, every one came, sooner or later, to join the opposition, and carried on the war at his post, and in his own manner. In pamphlets, journals, newspaper articles, songs, serious stories, historical scenes (for comedy had at this time passed from the stage to

books), allusions of all kinds, all vied in attacking and pricking the enemy from below the cunning net with which they were trying to envelop us. M. Théodore Leclercq was among those who pricked them most artfully and most successfully in his *Dramatic Proverbs*.

Hitherto, however, M. Leclercq had not been a politician, nor even an author : a man of wit and leisure, a man of the world and of society, he had never aimed at what is called a success and still less at a result. His whole life is shortly told. The little that we find to say about it will enable us the better to indicate the nature and the happy originality of his talent.

M. Mérimée remarked the other day (*Revue des Deux Mondes* of the 1 March) upon the very small number of anecdotes and facts relating to him. M. Théodore Leclercq was born at Paris, in 1777, of a good family of the Parisian bourgeoisie. His father, a rich manufacturer, had, if I am not mistaken, founded in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine a manufactory of wall-papers in which he was succeeded by Réveillon, the same who was odiously pillaged during the first troubles of 1789. The rich Parisian middle class has at all times produced men of shrewd wit, distinguished and unrestrained mockers, with the tone of the best society and speaking the purest of languages ; in the eighteenth century Mme Geoffrin, that dowager of good society, was sprung from it. The young Théodore Leclercq, coming down his Faubourg Saint-Antoine, always passed near Beaumarchais' garden. After the Terror, he naturally belonged to that band of more or less gilded and dandified young Royalists, who were vigorously and bravely struggling for elegant and civilized life. It was at this period of reaction, about the 18 Fructidor, that he first met at the Clichy Club M. Fiévée, his senior by several years, with whom he contracted that durable friendship which lasted more than forty years, and which was only cut short by death. M. Fiévée was one of the most distinguished minds of his time, sensible even in his passion, constant even in his inconstancies, an excellent novelist, witty and almost delicate, an able and clear-sighted political writer, almost a statesman : his mind touched many elevated things ; he had early made the round of all opinions. This had given him something positive, even with a foundation of doubt



and disillusion. Beside a mind so eminent and decided, M. Leclercq had but one course open to him, and he took it unconsciously; namely, whilst feeling his influence and perhaps his ascendancy, to remain himself and not to resemble him. I find that at about this time M. Leclercq had published a novel, *Le Château de Duncam ou l'Homme invisible*, in the year VIII (1800); the author only signed it with his initials, or rather he did not sign it at all. It is the book of a very young man, who writes in the taste of the day and without any originality. After that time M. Leclercq's mind was better occupied in turning its attention entirely in the direction of society and the amusing observations it offers to those who are able to make them. The taste for comedy was very wide-spread in the eighteenth century; the nineteenth, as soon as it felt that the ground was a little firm under its feet, began where the eighteenth had left off. In the fine days of the Consulate, Mme de Genlis, who was still in the fashion, one evening when she was expecting a great company, hit upon the idea of playing an improvised Proverb with M. Leclercq in her chimney-corner: that was surely a sign that he was acknowledged as a man of wit. The subject was a young poet reading his first elegy to a *woman of letters*. They had to launch headlong into exaggeration and absurdity. It appears that the success was great, and perhaps this first essay suggested to M. Leclercq the idea of writing Dialogues. Later at Haniburg (1810), he wrote Proverbs and had them acted by the French society who had gathered there after the wars of the Empire. There we are told that a general of our acquaintance one day imagined that he had discovered a unique subject for the gayest and most delightful of Proverbs. And what is the subject? was asked on all sides. 'Well, he replied, I do not quite know how to explain it; I should like you to see the whole of it at a glance; that is what puzzles me; I will try however. In the first place . . . there is a man who believes that *his cook is robbing him*. I wager that that appears commonplace to you? You shall see . . . Imagine then a man, a gentleman, a bourgeois, in a quilted dimity dressing-gown, and trousers the same . . . in *négligé* in fact, as a man might be in the morning who is fond of his ease. This gentleman comes into his sitting-room, just as anybody might come into a sitting-

room. Having entered, he sits down in his easy chair, and no sooner is he seated, when he calls out : “ *Ah ! mon Dieu ! I think my cook is robbing me !* ” Do you observe how simple it is ? . . . ’ And all the rest of it, according to the words put into the mouth of Dormeuil in the first of M. Leclercq’s published Proverbs, *La Manie des Proverbes*. \*

Before accompanying M. Fiévée to Hamburg, M. Théodore Leclercq had gone with him to England in 1802 ; he also accompanied him to his Prefecture in the department of the Nièvre (1813–1815) ; and everywhere, in foreign countries, in the provinces, while those around him were carrying on political observations and the work of administration, he amused himself with observing society, with catching its gay and careless aspects, in seeking themes for Proverbs, and, as soon as he found opportunities, in having them played. Thus he made a collection of absurd characters, and took a delight in making them act and play against each other. I forgot to say that, in one interval of his travels, M. Leclercq had been appointed principal Receiver in the Droits Réunis (Excise Office) at Paris, an excellent and lucrative post, but to which he was unable to tie himself down. The tedium of keeping accounts, and especially the anxiety caused by the responsibility, made him give it up less than two years after. He sensibly said to himself in the words of one of his characters : ‘ Jules knows very well how to occupy his time ; he has fortune and talents : what should he do in an office ?—It would give him an air of importance.—He is already sufficiently important as a man who has no needs : is that not better ? ’ The poet, somewhere, rightly calls him happy who, able to occupy and charm his leisure hours,

Ainsi que de talents a jadis hérité  
D’un bien modique et sûr qui fait la liberté.

This modest wealth which André Chénier desired, this wealth which comes from the family and which need not be earned by the sweat of one’s brow, *res non parita labore, sed relicta*, is also one of the wishes of the poet Martial. M. Leclercq’s father had left him more than a moderate income, more than a mere competency. He continued then to live and to find amusement in looking around him.

Sociability, shrewdness and raillery, those were the principal traits of this charming mind, which were blended, in practice, with that easy good nature and that indulgence which is ordinarily found in those who have not set the ideal of human nature too high. He readily put up with all that went on before him in the world, because it gave him matter for his raillery and his pleasure. He admitted even the fools and the impertinent, who were not troublesome intruders in his eyes: his keen mind penetrated and saw through them from every side, without their being aware of it, and he extracted from them, still with a sort of benevolence, amusement at their expense, and often amused them at the same time: 'Pooh! nonsense! when one is interested in others' business, one is never at a loss for something to do,' says a housemaid in one of his Proverbs. How much more so when one is interested in their absurdities, and is afterwards able slyly to put them in action? This putting in action of the absurdities of society is what constitutes a Proverb, and the most curious, here as in all things, was the back of the stage where each vanity was laid thoroughly bare. 'I adore Proverbs,' says one of M. Leclercq's characters: they are the finest invention, and the beginning of a thousand squabbles. As soon as they are introduced into a house, we are sure of enjoying all the differences of opinion, all the quarrels, all the hatreds, all the slanderings and calumnies which are usual among actors by profession: so I never fail to put my nose into them. The rôles do not concern me; I have not the slightest vanity on that score . . . What I love is the confidential communications which are made to me. I learn things there which I should not have known all my life'. No one ever excelled M. Leclercq in catching the tone of society bickerings, the scoldings, teazings and wheedlings of married couples, the gossipings, the meddlings and frictions of family life, the babblings, the curiosities and the malignities of intimate cliques. This kind of minute and subtly mocking observation seemed to be reserved for women; M. Leclercq has robbed them of their secret. Mme de Coulanges herself did not scratch more prettily and with more exquisite malice. He is one of those to whom we are tempted to say at times: Have you been a woman, Sir, that you know them so well? The dialogue bristles with smart things, with points as

sharp as needles. To give them body and import, to turn the needle into an arrow or a goad, it needed a little mingling of passion, and this mingling actually took place at that period which I have noted, from 1820 onwards, when the excesses of the *ultra* party and the Congregation stirred up sensible and independent minds. Then M. Leclercq felt within him a spark of that spirit of opposition with which the Parisian middle class have from time immemorial been easily animated. The arrows with which he played, though no less delicate, became sharper, more steely; they were steeped in a little bitterness which made them more keenly felt. Only now was his talent, hitherto confined within the circle of the drawing-room and of society, able to roam abroad and set up an aim, to really enter into the public fray, and become for a moment, without altering its nature, one of the arms of France.

The first two volumes of M. Leclercq's *Proverbes dramatiques* appeared in 1823, and the following volumes continued to be published to the number of nine or ten. The first seven may be especially referred to the period we have indicated, which, up to 1830, should be regarded as the moment of the author's vogue. One could not imagine a more modest Preface, and smacking less of the literary man, than that which M. Leclercq placed at the head of his first volume in 1823: 'I loved to play Proverbs, he said, and I have written some. Whenever any one loves to play them, to write them becomes a necessity: for, in this kind of pleasure, the parts must be arranged according to the resources offered by the society in which one happens to find oneself. A stranger, by my position and character, to the great events which have stirred the world, my friendships and the desire to see have led me into divers countries, and, wherever I have been, I have acted and produced Proverbs. They have amused . . .' A few years later, in a reprint and a new edition, this so simple and so kindly Preface was slightly altered, and M. Leclercq found it necessary to address a few words to the numerous arrangers, who had possessed themselves of the idea of certain Proverbs and transferred them to the stage, without asking his consent: 'The fact, he said, became established as a right, as happens in the case of very much more important things. I have been a stranger to these arrangements. The men of wit who have been

modest enough to seek the aid of mine, having never consulted me, have spared me even the trouble of saying polite and grateful things. To balance matters, it has never once happened to me to go to see how they had arranged me for the theatrical point of view'. Truly one could not avenge oneself more wittily and with a more seemly pleasantry : but this in itself is a vengeance, and the first Preface had none of the sweet bitterness of the second. However little of an author one may be, one never becomes one with impunity.

One of the first Proverbs, *Le Mariage manqué* (*The Marriage that did not come off*), renders most naturally the spitefulness prevailing in a little country-town, counting-house rivalries, provincial absurdities. The scene is laid in a milliner's shop, and opens with an excellent dialogue. Sophie, the shop-girl, takes up a hat and puts it on in a ridiculous way :

'Madame, who is it that puts her hat on like this ? cannot you guess ? Why, it's Mme Darbaut.

MME MAIRET.

'Mademoiselle, I have forbidden you to talk politics.

SOPHIE.

'But, Madame, talking about Mme Darbaut is not talking politics.

MME MAIRET.

'Excuse me, Mademoiselle. Mme Darbaut is the wife of the mayor, and we must never attack the authorities as long as they are in power . . .'

The dialogue brings us into the very atmosphere of 'comedy. The character of M. Fillars, an ill-natured news monger of the town, an envious man, 'who walks quite softly, and has no greater pleasure than to see those fall who have tried to run faster than himself,' who knows all about his neighbours, and what ails them, and says to himself, when he sees any happy people : *I am waiting for you* ; this character is designed and executed to perfection. Characters, dialogues, scenes, M. Leclercq has them all in his Proverbs : they lack as a rule only a little complicated action, or, to make up for it, a frame-work, which belongs to the craft, and which had to be put into them when transferring them to the stage, but was not

necessary between two screens and for the drawing-room horizon.

In his hands, besides, the Proverb has become as like as can be to a little comedy. We must remember what the dramatic Proverb was at the beginning and in the true spirit of its kind. It was a scene or several scenes written or improvised by the actors, after a simple outline plot, and containing a little secret. The secret is the Proverb itself (for example, *Good wine needs no bush*, or *Do not throw the helve after the hatchet*, or *The weakest go to the wall*, etc.), which was wrapped up in the action, and which the spectators had to guess: 'it should be of such a nature, says Carmontel (the great creator of the kind), that, when the spectators are told the answer, after failing to guess it, they should exclaim: *Ah! of course!* just as when they are told the answer to a conundrum which they have been unable to discover'. The answer to the Proverb, concealed in the action, at first appeared important enough not to be told, and Carmontel takes care to give each of his Proverbs a different title, giving the answer at the end of the volume, in order that the reader may guess it himself, if he is clever enough. M. Leclercq does not take so many precautions. The Proverb itself, which sometimes already forms the title, is regularly placed at the end of every little play, and marks the finish; when the word is spoken and the proverb is placed, we know that the piece is finished. But this word is with him often merely a pretext for some pretty scenes, just as the moral is only a pretext in many of La Fontaine's fables; it could be easily dispensed with. We see from this that M. Leclercq has reached the extreme limits of the kind; he has carried the Proverb as far as possible, short of decidedly making a comedy of it.

One of M. Leclercq's prettiest Proverbs, which gives us the best key to his talent, is that entitled: *Tous les comédiens ne sont pas au théâtre* (*Not all actors are on the stage*). A young man, who has gone to Montpellier, to study medicine, has incurred the anger of his uncle, a barrister in Paris and a member of the Institute, because this uncle, M. Partout, has heard that his nephew has sometimes taken part in private theatricals. The young man comes to Paris with his future father-in-law, the same at whose house he was guilty of his misdemeanour,

and finds occasion, before his uncle is on his guard, to prove to him that he, M. Partout, does the very same thing, playing different parts in different dresses. M. Partout is caught in the act and stands convicted of having played four different parts in one day, in the dress of the Academician, in his ordinary habit as an uncle, in the barrister's gown and in the uniform of a Captain of the Garde Nationale : ' You who are a man of the world, says the young man to his uncle, call that the spirit of the world ; I who am an actor call it acting. It is always the same thing, under a different name '. The talent and art of M. Leclercq thus consists in seizing comedy ready made as it passes before his eyes, in transferring it and framing it in true dialogues, without swelling it and giving it the relief necessary for the stage. He likes his comedy to be so to say on a level with the society in which he lives, that the one should be as the other, lightly extracted and cut out, brought face to face with and yet hardly separated from itself. As the drawing-room and the stage are on the same level, ' the company, as M. Patin has very well said, sees itself reflected in its paintings as in a mirror '. What we call the *machine*, small as it may be, is no business of his ; he has the moral and comic idea, and he neglects the motive power. He has been largely drawn upon and pillaged, and he has been a productive mine for professional authors. Let us be just to everybody : in possessing themselves of his ideas, they were obliged, in order to arrange and adjust them to the stage and the boards, to add something, and this something required some invention. Allow me to use a classical and time-honoured image : the stage Comedy has to put on the *sock* in order to hold ; M. Leclercq's Comedy, accustomed to walk on carpets, only puts on low shoes as it were, shoes of prunella or dainty slippers.

It is all the more dear and agreeable to intelligent people, to those who really love to enjoy the spectacle from their arm-chairs. More than one of M. Leclercq's Proverbs is merely a Character in the style of La Bruyère, developed, extended, put in action. *L'Humoriste* (*The Man of Humours*), for example, is a little masterpiece of the kind. This crotchety person, who begins his Sunday morning by crossing his wife and servant in every way, by refusing to go to the periodical family dinner on

the pretext that he has not had a written invitation, who does all he can to contradict others and himself, who has no sooner expressed a whim, than he regrets it; who is plagued by temptations and cannot make up his mind what to do, one moment wanting to play backgammon, the next moment to dine alone, then again to purge himself, and at the end of the day, after having been well scolded and had his crotchets driven out of him, tamely allows his mother-in-law to put him on a cotton nightcap with a long tassel, and goes to bed hungry, like a naughty boy who is ashamed of himself and is punished for malin-gering; the whole portrait is delightful, and if La Bruyère had turned his *Distrain* (*Absent-minded Man*) into a little comedy, this is just the way in which he might have set about it, and managed his scenes, sprinkling them with pretty mots. With what true and natural touches he has depicted the character of François the servant, who resists his master so often in the matter of cooking, who says so often that he cannot cook, and who, after succeeding in making the immense omelette of *fifteen eggs*, which he undertook with extreme reluctance, is so proud of himself, and then so grieved when his master says he will not eat it: '*Oh! my lovely omelette!*' he exclaims in a tone of mortification. In a twinkling François too has been seized with the vanity of the author.

Even when he might appear to exaggerate a little, as in the Proverb of *Madame Sorbet*, the coquettish and sentimental coffee-house keeper, who poses as a grieved widow and mourns her first husband so openly only in order to attract a second, what touches taken from nature! 'As soon, says this interesting widow to the man she is trying to captivate, as soon as I was allowed to dispose of the mortal remains of that dear M. Sorbet, I had them brought to my house at Belleville. A charming little house, with half a quarter of an acre of garden at the very most, but so well contrived, so artistically arranged, that one might swear it is twice as large . . .' Do you see how she takes advantage of her opportunity to display her virtues, her sensibility, and her little property at the same time? 'There, in a corner, she continues, beside a willow, there stands a tomb, it is my husband's. It is shaded all around by sombre cypresses. But what is really curious, is the sculptures on this tomb. *Mon*



*Dieu !* Sir, what taste people have nowadays for that sort of thing ! You see some little Genii fairly weeping over their inverted torches, but so well done, so beautifully finished, that you might look at them through a lens. And I had it for a trifle, a mere nothing . . . ' *I had it for a mere nothing*, there we have the tradeswoman showing through the sentimental widow and the pedantic *limonadière*. M. Leclercq is a master in these delicate and intimate touches of character.

*Le Château de Cartes* (*The Card House*) is one of his most graceful Proverbs, one of the most complete within its frame, and turns most agreeably to a pleasing moral. Two sisters, Mme de Verna and Mme de Goury, very different in character, have married two men who likewise differ in tastes and inclinations. Mme de Verna, married to an officer of engineers, loves her home, her husband, her child, and the two are amusing themselves, whilst talking, in building a card-castle for their little Gabriel, but a castle that will be like no other, and which his father has planned like a consummate engineer. Meanwhile M. de Goury, who finds life dull in the sole company of his wife, and makes it no less dull for her, is thinking of obtaining a lucrative post ; he has come to talk over the matter with his brother-in-law. ' How is Mme de Goury ? ' M. de Verna first asks him. ' A little better since her anxiety ', replies M. de Goury. Her anxiety is on account of her husband's appointment, which saves her from ennui and gives her something to think about. M. Leclercq is full of these shrewd mots. So again, in the scene between the two sisters, where Mme de Goury cannot understand or believe in her sister's domestic happiness, she returns to that idea of the appointment which is her only aim : ' You can see, she says, that M. de Goury must have a post. What gives me some hope, is that he can turn his mind to anything. They cannot raise the objection in his case, as in so many others, that such or such an appointment will not suit him : he has never done anything . . . ' *He has never done anything, he can turn his mind to anything*, this uncommon touch, which is properly the touch of ingenuity, is familiar to M. Leclercq, and his dialogues are sprinkled with the like touches.

Thus again he makes another man who is soliciting a post, in *L'Intrigant malencontreux* (*The Unfortunate*

*Intriguer*), say 'M. Mitis, do try to get my son into an office; you will do me a great service: he is good for nothing at all'. And this again, in the Proverb of *Madame Sorbet*, who has been asked to take part in private theatricals: 'I think that we two would act very badly; we are too frank, too natural ever to make good actors'. Marmontel, defining an analogous kind of subtlety, calls it a certain *obliquity in expression* which at first sight gives to the thought an air of unreality. Here it is more than obliquity, it is a sort of apparent contradiction between what one says and what one wants to say. One is tempted to stop the speaker and ask him: Is that really what you mean? It requires reflection to perceive that he has really only said what he thought. This kind of turn is especially pleasing to men of wit in conversation: but on the stage, many of these mots, which are like epigrams, would run a risk of being lost. In M. Leclercq this so frequent subtlety has the merit of being rapid, light, natural; it escapes from his characters like a *naïveté*.

*Le Jour et le Lendemain, ou la Nuit porte conseil* (*The Day and the Morrow, or The Night brings counsel*), is one of the most delicate subjects that could be treated, and M. Leclercq has succeeded in his task with a mixture of boldness and discretion which makes everything clear without emphasizing too much, and without violating the tone of good society. A pretty widow has decided, after a few years of widowhood, to marry again. She has just been wedded, that same morning, to M. de Gerfaut, a gentleman, a serious and reasonable man, who has read more than he has lived, forty years of age, who loves her, but without eagerness or passion. The pretty widow, seeing him so calm on that solemn day, and so undisturbed the whole evening in the drawing-room, is piqued and almost angry; she even repents of her step, and cannot hide her feelings before her dear friends, who are only too pleased to detect her weakness; on retiring to her room, she is on the point of taking some extreme step and deciding to continue her life as a widow, when M. de Gerfaut comes in, rather late and very calmly. Here the curtain falls, and in the second act the situation of the next morning has assumed an entirely different character. Every thought, every word of Mme de Gerfaut is penetrated with a tenderness which cannot contain itself and which beams around

her. Alice, the maid, sums up the whole situation in a word, when she says : ' Here have I been four years in Madame's service, and I have never known her to speak in the little voice she has this morning '. Nature is so well seized in its working in this little masterpiece, that somebody was able to call it a *physiological comedy*, though it does not cease to be reading fit for good company.

I say reading, for I dare not presume to suppose that the amiable society troop which contributed so much towards bringing M. Leclercq's Proverbs into fashion, have ever played that one. This troop, which had its stage in the drawing-room of M. Roger, of the Academy, and Secretary-General of the Post Office, was composed of the pretty and piquant Mme Roger, of M. and Mme Mennechet, of M. and Mme Auger and all their circle. The political intentions, however, which about 1824 began to mix with almost all M. Leclercq's Proverbs, must sometimes have embarrassed this charming circle, who sought in them principally an evening's diversion and an intellectual pleasure.

We have but to choose from among those Proverbs which possess this political character and which deserve mention. *Le Retour du Baron*, for example, is delightful, and does not yet exhibit any too emphatic touches. *Le Père Joseph*, *L'Intrigant malencontreux*, appear to me most powerful, and among those in which the sting of passion is most sharply perceptible. *Le Père Joseph* is composed of four dialogues in which the proselytizing and political Father speaks successively to the old Marquise, to her daughter the Comtesse, and to the son of the latter, a young officer, three generations, employing in the three cases the language that he thinks most suitable to each. In the fourth dialogue he is face to face with his own brother, once a Jacobin and still incorrigible, and he openly reveals his character. We might quote more than one powerful passage, which hit its mark at the time : but what is the use of reviving hatreds ? In *L'Intrigant malencontreux*, M. Mitis is a layman, a writer who carries on certain secret and not very honourable practices, which in the end turn against himself : ' At this moment, he says to an old friend whom he is trying to delude, there are two very distinct parties in the Government, the religious party which leads, and the political party which is getting

tired of being led. I belong to both. Do not laugh, that is the case'. And he persuades this friend Dalinville to follow his example, and to join one at least of the two sides : 'As a fellow-countryman, as a fellow-student, I give you the choice of sides ; you will be accepted by either ; I am certain of that. I will remain on the side you do not choose.

M. DALINVILLE, *gaily*.

'In this way, we can always count upon a protector in the triumphant party.

M. MITIS.

'Exactly . . .'

And he continues to expound his theory, crudely, cynically, and not without some spirit and eloquence. To judge rightly the effect of these satirical scenes, we must when reading them place ourselves in the right situation of the moment. But shall I say it ? when I consider what we have come to at this distance of twenty-five years, when I think again of the vigour of the attack and of the excessive confidence with which the enlightened bourgeoisie was entrusted with a rôle which they were unable to sustain, my pen drops from my hand, and I have three times thrown aside the book when on the point of extracting what I wished at first to quote.

Let us be satisfied with stating that M. Leclercq took his good share, in his own way, in that sharp, active, mocking, very French and very Parisian war, which has from time immemorial been declared in France against hypocrites and humbugs and dealers in morality ; he has his place in that brilliant train which, since and before the *Satyre Ménippée*, is continued up to Beaumarchais and further. He has been one of the most remarkable in that chosen band of lightly armed archers and slingers, before whom big armies melt away, and the more remarkable in that he was by nature more inoffensive and indolent.

He was, by the way, anything but a party man, and made fun of both sides, knowing that the species is everywhere the same. In one of his best Proverbs, *Le Jury*, he

was not afraid of rallying human nature in the very midst of one of the institutions which is most dear to liberal opinion. In *Le Duel*, he expressed his doctrine, based on tolerant experience, through the mouth of Mme Derville, an amiable grandmother who is trying to restrain the passions of her grandson. This grandson, like many young men, is angry and fires up with indignation at what he sees : he thinks that no form of human hypocrisy was ever more odious than that which he witnesses, and that, if one is unable to vanquish it, there is nothing more to be done but to take refuge, with Alceste, in the woods :

' No, replies his intelligent grandmother, we must only reason with ourselves as I did when I still had need of reasoning. Society, I said to myself, is composed of nothing but beggars. Are we angry with the beggars we see in the public places for the stratagems they employ to attract the attention of passers-by ? Did it ever occur to anybody to abuse them for covering themselves with plasters, or for putting on wooden legs of which they have no need ? Very well ! we should regard the other beggars we meet in the world in the same light, instead of choking with anger at the stratagems they invent to attract attention, and simply say to ourselves : *That is their plaster or their wooden leg* '.

In one of his last prefaces (1833), M. Leclercq depicted himself very well with his easy indolence and his unambitious disposition, which left to his observation its full scope and all its lucidity. ' Rather a good observer, he says, positively because I remain outside of active pretensions, I regard the doings of men, and I write without rising to any greater heights than that of ridicule, which is my sphere, leaving it to stronger pens than mine to combat what is odious '. Where he is most charming and most naturally in his sphere, is when he describes the little absurdities which do not arouse his impatience, but which make him smile and amuse him, the absurdities of people one sees and likes to see, with whom one acts without their suspecting that they themselves are playing a double part. Nobody had a keener sense and a greater knowledge than M. Leclercq of private life, of the life of society, in a word of the *drawing-room* and of all the piquant tittle-tattle, all the sharp-tongued gossip, all the quarrellings and bickerings, all the courteous and elegant hostili-

ties, that one takes in at a glance. He has caught and rendered all that in his rapid sketches with the distinction and the good taste of the best company, and in a way to please even those he has taken off and to stimulate them in their fooling.

A delicate wit, he needed, even for his mockery, to feel around him the warm air of favour and indulgence : and it never failed him. A happy man, after all, who had his day without waiting for or seeking it, who made the best of his intellect and developed his talent whilst taking his pleasure. That quantity of humorous ideas and seeds that he put in circulation never cost him anything but the delight of producing them. He had all the joys of fertility without the painful labours of achievement. He never knew that combined effort which consists in *mounting* a play, in constructing it, in rescuing it more or less safely from all the ambushes of the side-wings, in making it walk with head erect before the redoubtable foot-lights ; he never had to accomplish, as Voltaire puts it, that *demon's work*. When he was rehearsing one of his Proverbs with his elegant company and found them too capricious on that day, he was provided with the subject for a new proverb.

After the Revolution of July 1830, M. Leclercq still continued to produce and publish the collection of his volumes : however, if his reputation was henceforth quite established, the great moment of vogue and popular attention was past. M. Leclercq calmly returned to that *semi-shadow* which was so little displeasing to his modesty. He lost friends from whom he had not been separated for a single day ; he whom we could hardly imagine under any other form but that of intellectual youth and charm, was become an old man. The last years of his life, though surrounded and comforted by the attentions of the most amiable and affectionate family, were spent in cruel infirmities, which drew from him no complaints. Three years of paralysis did not wear out his patience and resignation. He felt, after all, that he had been happy.

He will survive among the series of our comic dramatists, as the faithful expression of the manners of the society of a moment ; nearer, I believe, to Picard than to Carmontel, and more suggestive of a La Bruyère, but a feminine and modified La Bruyère, who, seated in his armchair, amused himself, without so much labour

and assiduity, in relaxing his learned portraits, in putting aside his easel and his brushes, and allowing his easy observations to pass before him in scenes of light and voluble chatter.

## NOTES

Page 3, line 3. Alceste ; Molière's " Misanthrope."

Page 18, line 16 from bottom. His own descendant ; the Comte de Saint-Simon, the founder of French socialism (Saint-Simonism), 1760-1825.

Page 11, line 6. Bed of Justice (*lit de justice*) : the throne on which the King of France sat when he attended a Parliament ; also, a formal attendance of the King on a Parliament, to compel the registering of a royal edict, to try a peer, to create new taxes, etc.

Page 38, line 4 from bottom. A sonnet à la Oronte , see Molière's *Misanthrope*, I. 2.

Page 40, line 5. Pure Mascarille : exaggerated *préciosité*. See Molière's *Précieuses ridicules*.

Page 44, line 12. The Abbé Trublet wrote some *Mémoires sur Fontenelle*.

Page 45, line 6 from bottom. *Glory* effects ; the *gloire* is the mechanical contrivance for representing the heaven, the abode of the gods, on the stage.

Page 69, line 23. The celebrity of Herostratus ; Herostratus set fire to the temple of Diana at Ephesus (B.C. 356), to gain notoriety.

Page 72, last line. Louis-Gabriel de Bonald and Joseph de Maistre, zealous upholders of the throne and the altar.

Page 73, line 1. Walckenaer's *Mémoires sur Madame de Sévigné*, see the *Causerie* in the first volume.

Page 74, line 1. 'Bussy, our spring-time is departing and nearly ended ; it is time to enjoy the assured repose to which old age invites us : let us then flee those grandeurs that we madly pursue, and, without thinking of a more distant future, enjoy this life as long as we possess it.'

Line 13. 'Let Love be henceforth the end of our desires ; for the Gods created glory for themselves alone, and for us pleasures'.

Line 18. 'Let God be henceforth the object of our



desires ; he created mortals to enjoy his glory, and not pleasures '.

Page 89, line 11. ' Yet we are so infatuated that we cling to the empty honour of dwelling near their person, and we try to find a satisfaction in the mistaken idea, entertained by the rest of the world, that we are happy. In vain does reason urge us to retire unto private life, in vain do we sometimes, in our vexation, lend ear to it, their presence has too great an ascendancy over our zeal, and the small favour of an affectionate look binds us more closely than before '.

Page 91, line 2.

' Moi j'irais épouser une femme coquette !

J'irais, par ma constance aux affronts endurci,

Me mettre au rang des saints qu'a célébrés Bussi ! '

(Satire VIII).

Page 94, line 21. ' My brow was so proud of its crown of fair tresses, ringlets of gold and silver so often caressed ! and I was so hopeful when I entered into the world, proud and eyes downcast ! '

Last line. ' Artless in her gaiety, laughter-loving and without guile '.

Page 95, line 6 from bottom. ' She sings, and before her light scarf Corinne lowers the pride of her laurel '.

Page 97, line 10. ' And if at times my ills grieved his tender soul, the ungrateful man ! he called me his sister ! '

Page 99, line 11. ' Blissful Seraphs, dwellers in the heavens, stay for a moment your pleasing songs ! '

Page 100, line 16 from bottom. ' Her only fault perhaps a little pride, but a woman of genius and good-breeding '.

Page 101, line 13. ' The purest virgin has that savage instinct which makes her divine an infidelity. All hell was kindled in her agitated heart '.

Line 18. ' She chats and laughs ; like a happy woman she utters witty things ; she scatters her smart sayings ; all listen ; she is certainly a little satirical and malicious ; her excited mind avenges her suffering soul : the hurt that the one receives, the other gives back '.

Page 106, line 9 from bottom. ' Flatterer ! . . . I have exceeded the dreams of thy hatred ! '

Page 107, middle. ' This iron age praises money, not love '. Tibullus, II. 6, 17.

Page 110, line 1. 'However obscure his birth, the world, seeing him, would have acknowledged its master'. Racine, *Bérénice*, I, 5.

Page 116, line 19. *Mercuriales*; the Advocate-General's addresses at the re-opening of the sessions.

Page 122, line 19 from bottom. Dr. Samuel Clarke, an eminent philosopher and theologian (1675-1729).

Page 123, line 3. On the Duc de Broglie see the *Causeries du Lundi*, Vol. III of the present translation.

Line 5. Jeane-Étienne-Marie Portalis (1745-1807), an eminent jurist and chief author of the *Code Civil*.

Page 147, line 12. On Mme de Caylus see the *Causeries du Lundi*, Vol. IV of the present translation.

Page 161, line 16 from bottom. Isaiah iii. 16, 1. The words are translated from the French; the English version is too crude for quotation.

Page 162, line 10 from bottom. 'The grass could have borne her; a flower would not have received the impress of her steps'.

Page 164, last line. The Portuguese Nun; see Vol. II of the present translation, pp. 59 and 101, and Note.

Page 165, line 5. *Bérénice*; the heroine of Racine's touching play of that name, which is founded on a famous episode in the life of the Emperor Titus.

Page 168, line 12 from bottom. 'Reason must at length rule my life; I will no more foolishly misuse my time, and am not twenty, Sir, for my amusement'.

Page 169, line 15. 'He was a soldier before the peace was concluded'.

Page 170, line 6 from bottom. *Procès Fualdès*; one of the *causes célèbres* of the early nineteenth century, of which Mme Manson was the heroine. A full account of it may be seen in Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire*.

Page 173, line 11. 'With his purple-tinged fingers, he smilingly touches the delicate apricot, the slumbering almond, the peach quivering in its pink robe'.

Line 15. 'If he rests for a moment on the many-hued plain, we shall see spring up in the warmth of his fruitful breath the dark violet, delight of the villager, and the fragrant strawberry on the fringe of the woods'.

Line 15 from bottom. 'When the Christmas-rose, in our deep valleys, shudders under the sting of the early frosts, we shall again hear the voice of the autumn'.

Last lines. 'The more the calm has subdued my feverish energy, the more do I feel invaded by oppressive nothingness'.

Page 174, line 6. 'No sooner hatched to the light of day, invisible *infantes*, who are thy dynasty, make their sallies in the first heat of May'.

Page 175, line 6. 'Oh! tell me, what has become of her? does she still slumber in the peaceful grave? or, companion of the winds and the erring cloud, does she look upon another heaven and more beautiful stars? When the spring has crowned these trees with flowers, will the song of the nightingale hasten her awakening? does her bosom groan under the weight of marbles, does the echo of the old torrent disturb her sleep? and when November hangs his snow on the solitary cypress and chills us with fear; when the rain has soaked through the earth, will she say under her winding-sheet: "I am cold!" No; her life still wanders in a thousand atoms . . . object of my chaste oaths, thou hast not put on the robe of phantoms, and thy remains are to me still pleasant and charming.

'Faint perfumes, you are her breath; heaving billows, her sweet sighs; in the mist encircling the fountain, I have seen the gleam of her light raiment; Oh! tell me, when in the evening spring breezes float over the flowery lawn, is it not the sound of her dear voice, is it not her sighs that I hear in the woods?'

Page 176, line 13. 'Print your poems, and let us hear no more about them'.

Last four lines. 'Your poems, so often read and re-read, have raised a sedition on Parnassus; publish them, for heaven's sake, that we may hear the last of them'.

Page 178, line 4 from bottom. The taper that the Marshal carried in procession on a certain day.

Page 180, line 22. *Trilby; ou le Lutin d'Argail* (Argyle), the story of a Scotch elf or sprite, by Charles Nodier.

Page 192, line 7 from bottom. 'Which preserved the white innocence of the Lily'.

Page 202, line 12. 'When by heaven's decree two beings are made for each other, Lise, their hearts are quickly united . . . in a moment their esteem, their attraction, their love is mutual; all their words find easy persuasion'.

Page 211, line 9 from bottom. 'Has inherited both talents and a modest but sure income, which makes him free'.

Page 213, line 5. The *ultra* party, i.e. the ultra-Royalists. The Congregation, a politico-religious society under the Restoration.



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